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THE
BATTLE AND BURDEN
OF LIFE



J. E. ALLEN BROWN D. D.



The Battle and Burden of Life.



THE
BATTLE AND BURDEN
OF LIFE.

BY
JAMES BALDWIN BROWN, B.A.,
AUTHOR OF "THE HOME LIFE," "FIRST PRINCIPLES OF ECCLESIASTICAL
TRUTH," "THE HIGHER LIFE," ETC., ETC.

"Quit you like men, be strong."



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P R E F A C E .

I SEND forth this little book, on the Battle and Burden of Life, in the hope that it may help some young soldiers to bear themselves bravely in the battle, and, believing, to win the victory of faith. My aim, as will be seen, has been directly practical. I have but glanced at some of the more momentous of the theological, moral, and social problems of our times. My object has been to stir and to stimulate, especially the young, whose battle is a hard one in these days in which we live. Some of the discourses have already appeared in the *Congregationalist*; I have added two, which give to the subject a kind of completeness; and I now send them out in this completed form, with the earnest exhortation to all young friends into whose hands the book may come, "Quit you like men, be strong;" "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

J. BALDWIN BROWN.

KENT VILLA, BRIXTON HILL,
Christmas, 1874.

I.

ARMED FOR ONSET.

“Put on the whole armour of God.”—EPH. vi. 11.

THERE was once a little knot of unknown, unlettered, and wholly undistinguished men and women, assembled in an upper chamber in Jerusalem (the number of the names together was about one hundred and twenty), and that was literally the whole visible apparatus of force which God had at His disposal for the reconquest and the restoration of the world. The Lord came to the world to be “a King;” to rescue the earth from the hand of the Evil One, who was wasting and destroying it, and to re-establish it in peace and blessedness under the righteous Divine reign. The work which He came to accomplish had been for ages the burden of prophetic vision; nay, it had been from eternity the great thought and purpose of the Father’s heart. This purpose alone explains the groaning and the travail of the vast Creation all created things are pregnant with a

hope, which the Lord by His Incarnation came to fulfil. The purpose of the past and the hope of the future, the destinies of God's eternal kingdom, were hanging on the fulfilment of the prophetic vision of the Saviour, which He saw through the cloud of the last agony: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And God had there a few poor men and women who loved Him, who knew His power, who believed His word, and who had received His King; and by them, and absolutely by nothing earthly but them, He was prepared to commence and finally to accomplish the work.

How entirely He trusted them! Those few poor men and women were charged with the vital energy which was to regenerate mankind. There was no attempt to supplement their weak human strength by any of the forces of this world. By them, as He could strengthen and inspire them, the world was to be won to Christ. And how grandly they served Him; how nobly they responded to the trust! Before the last of that little band was called to his rest, the Gospel had been borne in triumph through the civilised world. They "put on the whole armour of God," and conquered. We live in days when the Church has a vast apparatus of wealth, influence, and

worldly force at her disposal. She is set visibly in the world's high places. The man who calls himself the vicar of Christ, and the successor of the leader of that little Apostolic band, claims the supremacy over all the kings of the earth. The priest who is at the head of the Established Christianity of England is honoured by the State as the first subject in the realm. The resources of the Christian Church in our day are enormous, her wealth extravagant. The worldly powers gladly place their influence and countenance at her disposal for the accomplishment of her spiritual work. And yet we are moaning over a careless, listless, thoughtless, unbelieving generation. "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" is the sad question still. One cannot but smile at the contrast when one thinks of what once grew out of one hundred and twenty poor men and women, who had nothing, absolutely nothing, but a faith in their hearts, a word on their lips, a light in their eyes, which seemed to speak to the world's sad, weary soul of God and heaven; which made men think that God at last had visited His people, and which kindled a great, deep joy in aching, longing hearts, wherever those messengers of a Gospel trod. And the world literally went down before them. Its

pleasure, its business, its statecraft, its priestcraft, its riches, its traditions, backed by the habits and beliefs of centuries, and its gods, were powerless to resist them.

"Apollo, Pan, and Love,
And even Olympian Jove,
Grew weak, for killing truth had glared on them."

By the might of a word and a life, a word on their lips and a life in their hearts, which were alike charged with celestial energy, they and those who trod in their footsteps made the religion of the Cross supreme throughout the whole Roman world. It was the armour of God with which they won the battle, and that armour in a word was—life.

I. The fundamental conception which underlies the whole passage is, that the Christian is Christ's soldier against the devil and against his works.

It is less, we imagine, the inward battle of the spiritual life than the great struggle of the world's life, which is the subject of these stirring words. It is the great battle of the children of the Kingdom with the evil which they see all around them, and against which Christ has made them His soldiers—the strife which distracts the universe, light against darkness, good against evil, Cosmos

against Chaos, life against death. The devil is the waster and destroyer. He is the author of confusion in the order of Creation, of pain and sorrow and death in the world of men. It is the sin which stains and scars, the corruption that rots in the realm of life, which God arms His soldiers to fight against and to destroy. Most of the images and allusions are manifestly to the great struggle of the kingdom of order, light, and life, against the confusion and darkness of the devil's reign. "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of the world,* against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

The inward struggle was unquestionably before the mind of the Apostle. He had no notion of setting men to tame the evil of the world, before they had tamed the evil of their own hearts. But it is rather as the condition of effectual service as good soldiers of Jesus Christ against the great adversary, that he would have them master and rule the inward world. That is the first condition of any high achievement. Those incapable of self-denial, self-mastery, self-rule, are worthless for the higher service of man and of God. But

* Lit., the world-rulers of this darkness.

this inward struggle is only the prelude of the outer. Self-denial, self-conquest, self-control, self-devotion, the curbing of passion, the crushing of lust, are the furniture of the soldier for the great conflict by which the world's passion is to be tamed, its lust is to be mortified, its self is to be denied, and Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose cross is the symbol of all-suffering and sacrificing love, is to be exalted to its throne. God's force for the overthrow of all that resists His dominion, and makes His world seem sometimes, when it celebrates its Saturnalia of violence and lust, more like a vestibule of hell than the threshold of heaven, is—not celestial armies, not cherubim and seraphim, not the splendours of His burning presence, not the might of His terrible hand, but living human souls, souls quickened, souls inspired by the breath of His life, and able, by the pure strength of that life, to cast down the strongholds of Satan, to abase every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. To me there is something infinitely inspiring in this thought that the forces which won that great victory of the Apostolic age were purely vital. Men and women in whom the light of God was shining, in whom the life of God was

glowing, went forth in that simple, irresistible might, and overthrew the world. "These men that have turned the world upside-down have come hither also." And the only strength which they brought with them was the life of God within them. This leads me to the second point, on which it seems important to dwell.

II. The fact that they were the soldiers of God, that they knew themselves to be enrolled, armed, and led by Him, was victorious strength to them. "By that sign" they conquered.

It appears to me that nothing is more clearly written on the very face of the world's history, than that an entirely new and higher course of human development commenced in the Apostolic age. In some way, about that time, what I may call a vital revolution took place throughout the Roman world. We believe that a new Divine life entered into it and made all things new. Those who reject this account of it, find it hard to trace that renewing to anything which lay in the path of the natural development of mankind. The world was simply dying of selfishness, cruelty, and lust, when a power from God entered into it, stirred its failing pulses, thrilled in its stiffening limbs, and raised it up in newness of life. The men who led the revolution, who, humanly speak-

ing, created it, were men who believed intensely that they were the enlisted soldiers and servants of the Most High—called, separated, sealed by Him as His ministers for that transcendent work. "Necessity is laid upon me to preach the Gospel," they cried; "yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." Knowing well that they had weapons of heavenly temper and proof, being sure that the Lord Himself was fighting on in the far front, the Captain and Finisher of that good fight of faith, they struck the world down underneath their feet, and compelled the men of the world to own the power of their King. The vital revolution in the world's history really began when "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," was first made bare; when men were seen and heard among their fellows who knew that God was with them, for they had seen His form, had heard His voice, had received and cherished His promise, and they made men hear the sound of their Master's feet behind them wherever they moved.

It is not simply as the dying Wesley said, "The best of all is, God is with us." It is not the *best* of all in the case of the Apostles and Apostolic men; it is literally all. It is the one sole but all-comprehensive reason of the splendid power and wide success of the Apostolic ministry. All the

world's intelligence, wisdom, sympathy, tenderness, and force, could they have been concentrated on that Apostolic age, could have wrought but a fugitive and fruitless marvel. It is idle to talk of such a concentration. Such concentration of all the noblest human faculties is only possible under the conditions which existed in the Apostolic Church; "devotion"—as Mr. Harrison strangely says, in the last sentences of his *Essay on the utter fruitlessness of any speculation as to the why, how, and whither of our being*,—"to an intelligible and sensible head, a real sense of incorporation with a living and controlling force, the deliberate effort to serve an immortal Humanity," which they realized in that Apostolic age with intense rapture, and in the strength of which they remade the world.

But supposing the possibility of such concentration, the world had still been left unredeemed. It was God with those men, God's armour upon them, which redeemed, reformed, restored society. And in saying this, I am far from unmindful of the fact that all the great leaders of the religious reformations of heathendom have claimed Divine inspiration, and have affirmed that it was in the name and by the strength of God that they spake and wrought upon mankind. I am far

from venturing to deny that God was with them, and was the source of their strength for all the purest and noblest work which they accomplished. But it was at best the Divine working feebly and fitfully through the grossness and weakness of the human; sore oppressed, as the Divine spark may be oppressed, perhaps is being oppressed in us, by the vanity, the selfishness, the fleshliness of that with which it had to deal. The baptism of Pentecost in its measure stands by itself in human history. Somehow men were then made capable of a possession by the Divine Spirit, in a measure never realized in other ages and regions by the children of our race. It was because they had known the Divine man, and the things of God which He alone could reveal to man, that the Spirit found in them organs of such wondrous capacity and force for His highest work. It was One to whom, as God manifest in the flesh, the Spirit was given without measure; One who had no bounds or "faults" to limit or to divert the flow of the vital energy; One through whom God could be seen, heard, known, by the children of our sinful race; One who could say, and compel men's consciences and hearts to recognize the truth of the saying, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," and "I and my Father are one;" who

made those men feel that in a wholly transcendent sense God had visited His people, would, with a new fulness of energy, dwell, walk, and work among them, and thus begin by the visible interposition of the Almighty hand the reconstruction of human society.

This knowledge of "God manifest in the flesh" was the essential condition of their spiritual power, of that peculiar measure of inspiration which they enjoyed. It is said in one significant passage, "The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." The Spirit works by the Word. He quickens and develops germs already latent within, He "takes of the things of Christ and shows them to the soul." The things of Christ which were, so to speak, the instruments of His operation, were constituted by the Incarnation, the Sacrifice, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of the Lord. With these things of Christ, in all the fulness and freshness of their force, the eyes, the ears, the minds, the hearts of these men had been in contact; and this created an inward depth and largeness of spiritual apprehension, which made them the most capable and powerful organs of the Divine Spirit whom God has ever employed in the education of the world. Thus they became

strong to cast down the strongholds of Satan, to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The world's forces, "the world-rulers of this darkness," were scattered like dust before them ; while to their word, to their quickening inspiring influence, the innermost depths of man's thought and feeling were laid bare. There, where a Divine hand alone could reach and touch humanity, these men, because the hand of the Lord was with them, were able to sow the germs of the regeneration of human society. It is a grand study, the grandest in history—these fundamental conditions of this vital reformation. I am persuaded that the more deeply it is studied, the more will it set us face to face with Life—the Life which is the Light of men.

We believe but dimly now both in the Lord and in His armour. The living form of the living Captain seems to fade in the distance ; those men knew that He was in presence fighting by their side. We have surrounded ourselves with a dim theological haze, through which the living forms of the world which is behind the veil look very vague and ghostlike. It is the inevitable result of ages of theological strife and contention, of subtile definition and arrogant assertion, that the



living substance which is behind the creeds shall be lost in the cloud of words. And yet man must theologize. It is the inevitable demand of his higher nature. He was made to know God and to study the world, the worlds in the light of that knowledge; he must construct his system of knowledge, and be able to give to himself and why he believes. But none the less is it needful to all who ask him a rational account of what and that periods should arrive in the history of man's higher development, when his system of religious thought receives rude, it may be shattering, shocks; not that he may be left groping and moaning in darkness, but that he may gain a new and clearer vision of the Living Presence, and begin to construct with larger bases and loftier aims afresh.

Through such a period we are assuredly passing. There is much anxious thought and spiritual strain before us. But such crises are always not unto death, but unto life. Their work is to bring us nearer to God, not to move Him farther away. But it is saddening for the present, in view of the pressing exigencies of our times, to see how largely the armoury of this world,—learning, rhetoric, dialectical skill, and even social status and culture, titles, dignities, and political influences,—

have taken the place, in our estimate of the forces which are at our disposal for our spiritual work, of "the whole armour of God." Where are the men, we are tempted to cry sadly, who in these days make us see and feel that they have the hand of the Lord upon them, while the sword of the Spirit flashes through their words? We are keenly critical. We meditate, compare, analyse and conclude, with a diligence and a cogency worthy of all honour, and which are probably unmatched in, at any rate, recent history. But while we weigh the elements of the power, and duly register them, the living force escapes us. Men listen coolly, for the most part with dulness, while some are conscious of a lively glow of satisfaction as they catch the tones of a "very pleasant song of one that hath a lovely voice, and can play well upon an instrument;" they hear the words, but they do them not. And why? They miss the Lord from our midst.

The solution of doubt, men tell us, is action. How many insoluble critical puzzles vanish in a moment before one flash of life. Men see then what they have been groping or hunting for, and which no effort of the understanding will substantiate for them; they see and believe. And how many of the desperate difficulties, as they

seem to us, which torment and almost strangle us, would go down before one sweep of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." A great Christian life explains much to men which is else inexplicable; life is the light of humanity still. It is our deadness that makes our darkness. Lord, that we might live, and we should see. "Lord increase our faith." "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

I propose to consider these weapons and pieces of the Divine armour in detail; there is but one point on which I dwell earnestly in this place by way of introduction, and as striking the key-note of the method by which the whole subject will be treated. The furniture of the soul for this spiritual war is vital, purely and simply vital. The one mastering force to which Christ looked to win for Him the empire which He came to

claim and to conquer, was pure, strong, spiritual life. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. iv. 8.)

There is nothing so wonderful, so inspiring, so charged with hope, as the power of spiritual qualities, the virtues and graces of the inner man, to purify, sweeten, gladden, and save every sphere which they haunt, and every soul whom they can draw within their spells. It is the virtue which passes out of life which heals the issues whence the very heart's blood of society is draining away. Armour is both offensive and defensive. It is worth our while to remember that it is life, pure strong life, continually renewed by contact with the vital fountain, which also guards, shields, and saves. It is as good for defence as for offence; but, as we shall see, the main purpose of the defensive armour of a living warrior is to make his offence, his onset, more effectual. "To the pure all things are pure." The Lord walked amid all the temptations which fill us with terror, absolutely unharmed. To Him they were as empty of fascination as a banquet would be to a Newton

when his soul was aglow with the strain of his great discovery, or as a bacchanalian revel would be to a mother who had just watched the awful death-shadow stealing over the face of a darling child.

But it is the offensive armour which is chiefly in question here, and of that mainly I shall treat. The wise ones are telling us that Christianity is a failure; that it has been weighed in the balance, and found wanting. Look around, they say; see how your Churches are losing their hold; how the sceptre which the Church once wielded so grandly is slipping from its trembling, paralysed hand. And we answer, The age has yet to try Christianity. Our costly, cumbrous, pompous, worldly apparatus is just at the opposite pole of influence to that force which once did renew the world. Oh, for a new baptism from the vital springs! Oh that life would stream down upon us pure, vivid from its glowing fountain! The world would see then what power there is in Christ to save.

II.

THE GIRDLE OF TRUTH.

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.”—EPH. vi. 14.

THE whole bearing of this passage is on the Christian man as God's soldier against the devil and against his works; His soldier in that great battle of which the Universe is the theatre, the fruit of whose victories will be gathered in Eternity. A hundred and twenty poor men and women the Lord had once in an upper chamber in Jerusalem; and this was His one visible apparatus of force for the overthrow of the devil's dominion, and the establishment of His own blessed and glorious reign. They took unto them the whole armour of God, and they conquered. The life of God entered into them, flowed through them, flashed from them; and the world, the flesh, and the devil everywhere went down before their assault. Their armour was simply life. The glow and the energy of the Divine life which was in them, weak, few, poor as they were, created that one vital reformation which has formed the

turning-point in the history of the civilised world. It is a thought full of inspiration. The weapons which won that great battle of the Lord were purely vital. The work which life then commenced with victorious energy, life, when the times of refreshing shall come on us from the presence of the Lord, will triumphantly complete.

It is the soldier armed and paraded for onset who is here set before us—Christ's soldier, charged to fight His battle and the battle of humanity against the sin, the selfishness, the cruelty, the tyranny, the lies, the lust, which are wearing and wasting His world. It is not the picture of the man who is fighting for safety, for his own personal salvation, which is here presented to us. The inward battle was manifestly, as we have seen, before the mind's eye of the Apostle ; but this inward conflict is but the prelude to the public service and ministry, the struggle against the evil which is destroying the world, in which the Saviour arms His disciple to take part. " We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." That we may wrestle effectually, that we may have the right to take part in this high enterprise, the

battle must be fought out sternly within, but always with a view to the wider service of Christ and of mankind. One gets a little impatient to find the commentators mainly insisting that the armour is defensive; the only offensive weapon which is mentioned being "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." In the highest sense, every joint and piece of the armour of a *living* warrior is offensive. Forts stay where they are placed, and suffer themselves to be shot at. If they can endure the fiery hail, and keep the foe at a distance, it is all that is asked of them; the end of their existence is thereby fulfilled. But a living soldier in the good old times cased himself in steel, not that he might stand safely to be shot at, but that he might bear himself, with all his energy unspent, with his life-blood bounding in his veins, into the very heart of the enemy's war.

What is essentially the use of a helmet and a breastplate? Surely to enable a man to deliver the stroke of his sword with certainty and vigour; to assure him that, while his arm is lifted to strike, no blow shall reach his heart and disable him for ever. His defensive armour is a distinct part of his offensive force; it is worthless unless it makes the sword-stroke more swift and

keen. Not that he may bring himself safe out of the battle, but that he may make himself of higher use to the army and to his captain, his vital points are shielded by armour of proof from the weapons of the foe. The soldier who is always thinking how safe he is in his armour, and chuckling over the certainty that he will come out of the battle unharmed, will find his place among the camp followers when the battle is ended; when the veterans, whose wounds are in front, pass up before the great Captain, to hear His "Well done," and to receive from His hand the glorious prize.

I insist on this strenuously because I believe that there is nothing which spiritually is more unhealthy, more destructive to the manly freedom and noble carriage of the Christian soldier, than the idea that the only battle-field about which he needs to greatly trouble himself is within. The man who is always looking within soon loses the power of looking around and above. And this is the reason why so many self-centred disciples, who are always poring over their own evidences and experiences, and inspecting their own vital organs, can only preach a Kingdom of Heaven as small and mean as their own withered natures, and as dry of vital juices as their own

bloodless hearts. And this is the reason, further, why the Kingdom of Heaven of our popular theology is so poor a realm that our philosophers flout it, and say that they find more freedom, more room for the play of their higher powers, in searching into the mystery of Creation, than we can offer them in that sphere of thought which the theologians occupy as though it were exclusively their own. It has come to this, that some of our ablest thinkers fly from the spiritual world to the material, in search of truth, freedom, and the play of life. Some large portion of the responsibility for this state of things we may be sure is at the door of those who have claimed a kind of monopoly of spiritual truth and spiritual work. A healthier state of things will be created when we have mastered more thoroughly the Master's saying, "The Kingdom of God is among you."

• It is then as Christ's soldiers, called up to the help of the Lord against the host of evils which are wasting and destroying His world, that the Apostle bids us take to ourselves the whole armour of God, and calls on us to "stand, having our loins girt about with truth." Consider—

I. Truth, the thought of God, is the girdle of all things. It binds and holds all things together in all the spheres.

It is with the band which holds the stars in their orbits and the constellations on their thrones, that the Apostle bids us bind ourselves, that we may be fully equipped for the spiritual war.

And this suggests to us—

1. The oneness of the idea which rules through the vast Creation, and holds together all things in unity.

“One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off Divine event
To which the whole creation moves.”

We see and measure but a little part of the unity.

“Our little systems have their day ;
They have their day, and cease to be.
They are but broken lights of Thee ;
And Thou, O God, art more than they.”

But we see unities. Our intellect is able to comprehend many diverse appearances under one law ; and this discovery of unity in multiformity, of the one principle which binds together things to the eye manifold and diverse, is the keenest delight which the intellect knows. Is it not a strong proof that man was made to search for and to discover *the* unity—Him in whom all things are one? But not here, in its fulness. We are capable here but of tentative efforts. Unities we

discover, helping us continually nearer to the central unity ; but here, at any rate, that aim and end of man's intellectual quest seems veiled.

“ The one remains ; the many change and pass.
Heaven's light for ever shines ; Earth's shadows fly.
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until death tramples it to fragments.”

Then the “ broken lights ” will recompose themselves in one pure beam ; then “ in my flesh I shall see God.”

But here on earth we are continually discovering unities ; and we discover them joyfully. The modern theory of evolution is the most daring attempt in this direction which this age has witnessed. Our sages tell us that one blind principle is working without foresight, nay, without sight, through all the spheres. They would have us believe that the Christian as he stands, having his loins girt about with truth—as he believes on the summons and at the behest of God—is really only paraded by this invisible force ; which parades quite as methodically, but with quite as little reference to spiritual aims and ultimate ends, the grains of matter which are fused into yon granite mountain, or the ridge of pines there, with keen sword-blade bare, on

guard along that rocky crest, above the smiling fields and peaceful homes below.

And there is after all something in this statement with which a Christian thinker may feel profound sympathy, while there is something which he will as intensely repel. There can be no doubt that the whole Creation is organized in this attitude of conflict. Every arrangement of particles is a secret or manifest struggle for existence. The Christian is but paraded in the same attitude of battle; he is struggling for the things which seem to him to make for the peace, the order, the salvation of the world. But we seem to see a higher Power behind both, parading them both with full intelligence and purpose; handling the dust and the pine-blades as *things* under His hand, treating the Christian as a son who is dear to His heart—whom He seeks to stir to sympathy with His purposes, and to make a willing, joyful combatant for a victory which will be as glorious as it will be eternal. The force working through all things, of which the evolutionist tells us, is blind; it has no speculation in its eye—it has no eye even “to glare withal.” We too discern power; we see the unity of its manifestations and its methods; but it seems to us to have an eye to see the end to which it is working, and to see

the path which starts from Calvary by which that end is to be gained, and to be made sure for ever.

“Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth,” and remember—

2. That it is truth which also undergirds the world. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” By that word they stand. There is an order in which all created things subsist. There is an order in which all human things—the things of man’s creation, all society, all government, all the forms of human activity, subsist. The law which combines and holds together things in the physical sphere is laid down with the most absolute imperativeness. Do this, and thou shalt live, is said with peremptory clearness to every blade of grass, every grain of sand, every bud that creams in the woodlands in spring, every insect that hums in the midsummer noon. Do this, and thou shalt live; do that, and thou shalt die. In the human world the law is as imperative, though there appears to be more room for variations; it seems as if man, within limits, could strain or resist the law, and play the god in his little world. But the law the while is vindicating itself. It is preparing itself to declare, in tones

which its subjects *must* listen to, that the one bond by which man lives in societies, and holds out against dissolution, is, the Truth. But it is really false to say that there is any resistance to, or strain of law possible, even in the human sphere. You may play the beast or the fiend in your social circle: that freedom is given to you; you may make many a heart that is dear to God weary and sad, and Heaven's patience may seem to be profound. But "be not deceived; God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that also he shall reap." The law is in full play. Every wrong sets in movement at once an awful apparatus of retribution; and though it is in the power of man's will to shut his eyes to it for the moment, the moment is a brief one. It but gathers mass and force, and renders the stroke at last more shattering, the judgment more tremendous and sure.

There is but one rule according to which it can be well with any thing or being in this great Universe—the Truth: the word which God has spoken about that thing or being, the way which He has marked for it, wherein if it walks and works it will be well. That word God has enfolded in the nature of *things*—an inward necessity whose organ none can discover, whose way none can

trace, impels them to their development. The inward law, the Divine word, is enfolded, too, within man's nature; but with him we rise into a higher sphere. The word is re-echoed, repeated from the lips of God, in the form of Revelation, that it may enter man's mind, stimulate his will, and work with his freedom. "Thou sayest that I am a King," said the Master in the supreme moment of His history; "to this end was I born, for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

II. "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth."

1. The loins are the head of the limbs, of all the muscular force and activity of the frame. Let your loins be girt with truth. The favourite idea for the elucidation of this passage seems to be this. The loins are the seat of at any rate many of the vital organs. They are singularly undefended by nature; they have no framework of bone to guard them; they need special defensive armour, therefore, to save the vital treasure which they hold from wreck. So let the loins of the mind be girt about with truth; let them put on the defensive armour of a truth-loving and truth-speaking mind; and then the foe, whose weapon is a lie, will

find no unguarded place whereby he may break in and destroy the soul.

I confess that this interpretation seems to me to miss the whole point and force of the passage. The loins are not only the seat of vital organs, but they are the head of the muscular force, of the whole movement and impetus of the man; while the use of a girdle is not to guard but to brace, to tighten the tension of all the powers. The exhortation does not mean, Wrap round you like the many-folded oriental girdle the tissue of the Divine word, tied with tapes of texts that it may be all tight and trim, so that your vital functions may have a safe investiture, and you yourself may carry on, without either chills or stabs, the due processes and activities of the life. No; it is quite a different key-note of thought which is struck in the text. Gird your loins with truth; wrap, not words, but *the word* of God about you, His mind, His purpose, His hope about your life. Enter into His counsel about your being; hear His word about your work; be found ever where His hand has placed you, and about the work which He has given you to do.

“Gird up the loins of your mind.” What are the loins of the mind? What is the head of the moral limbs and movements, and centre of spiritual force?

Surely the purpose, the mind of a man about his duty, about himself, about his fellow-men, about God, out of which all his thinkings, willings, and doings flow. There is that individual element in every man which makes him just what he is. He is as that is. It is not a little curious that there is one bone in the lumbar region which is supposed to be the typical bone of the body, and which thinkers in old time believed to be the seed of the body of the resurrection. It is one of the lowest of the vertebræ of the spine, and it rules all the rest. It was said of a consummate comparative anatomist, that if you were to give him that one bone of the skeleton of any vertebrate animal, he could construct from it with perfect accuracy the whole system. There is something which corresponds to this in the structure of the moral man—that inner thought and vital purpose which mould the life and make the destiny. Gird that about, tightening its tension, moulding its arm, giving force and direction to its play—by Truth.

2. What truth? Manifestly not objective truth, again we are told. It cannot, it is said, be the word of God, for that is spoken of subsequently as "the sword." It must, therefore, mean subjective truth—truthfulness, the mind which loves

and seeks the truth. Certainly it is quite clear that the words cannot apply to the objective truth, as set forth in Scripture words. It does not mean, Gird yourself with Scripture texts. But I am far from sure that the reference of the Apostle is not to objective truth as it abides in the Word, "Who liveth and abideth for ever." The truth with which we are to gird ourselves can be, one would think, no mere subjective state. It must surely be something which has an organ outside of us; something which we can lay hold of, grasp, bind round us, and which will brace and invigorate all our powers. This truth is not so much our truthfulness, our desire to know and do the truth, as the truth about our lives which God has spoken, the law of duty which He has laid down for us, the mind about our place and work in the Creation which He has quickened within us, and which, as face answers to face in a glass, reflects the Divine idea. It is a state of mind within us certainly; but it is that which grasps and holds something Divine above us, and applies to the joints and limbs of the inner man that girdle of force which zones the angels, and on earth binds the stars, the clouds, the birds, and the lilies in one.

Gird yourself by seizing and holding the truth about your being as God sees it and God ordains it;

the truth of your place and work in the Creation ; your relation to your fellow-men, to all on earth around you, and to God. There is a life for which you were fashioned, which God meant you to live, which it enters into His scheme of the Universe that you shall live ; your failing to live which is sorrow and loss to His Kingdom, while to you it is death. Find the truth about it, and work it into your inmost purpose. Bind the loins of your mind with it, and stand in the perfect form and full force of your manhood, girt about with truth, knowing yourself, your work, your Lord, and the truth of all things about your life. You would move then with the certainty of a planet ; you would strike the works of the devil with the force of a thunderbolt. The whole rout of lusts and lies that distract and defile the world which surrounds you would go down before your onset. You would come to be—and it is the very highest glory to which a man on earth can rise—a fellow-helper with Christ in the Kingdom of God.

It is the vocation, the sense of a duty to God, and to man in the fear of God, which gives the true tension and force to the powers. Why, the brilliant literary advocate of Positivism in England has quite recently wound up a remarkable essay, in which he strove to prove that there is no par-

ticular necessity laid on man or mankind to worry about what he calls certain metaphysical problems—that is, the whence, the why, the whither of his life—with these notable words: “A religion of action, a religion of social duty, devotion to an intelligible and sensible head, a real sense of incorporation with a living and controlling force, the deliberate effort to serve an immortal humanity—this and this alone can absorb the musings and cravings of the spiritual man. . . . Lives will continue to be wasted in listless yearning around the unreal and the unknowable, until they have been transfigured into a world of social activity under the impulses of devotion to a supreme power, as humanly real as it is demonstrably known.” Is this a dumb cry, which, could it become spiritually articulate, would breathe the prayer, “We would see Jesus”? It looks like it; and it is but one of the many signs that one notes, that there is a great spiritual craving rising up in the midst of the bare desert of materialism; which in time may form a means of reconciliation between our philosophers and a wiser, humbler, wider, more human, and therefore more Christian Church.

But gird up the loins of your mind by truth—the truth of your duty to man and to God. Settle it at once that you were not sent into this world

to be idle, or even to be happy; that you were sent on service, enlisted for a war, enrolled as a comrade, a fellow-combatant with the Highest; not to seek your own things, to feather your own nest, to smoothen your own path, but to live purely, justly, nobly, lovingly, whatever it may cost. Live thus, and it is just this inspiration, which the words quoted above so eloquently describe, that you will feel; the "impulse of devotion" will make your life a perpetual psalm of praise. And your life will become an inspiration to all around you. You will win men by inspiring them; you will pass among the throngs with a certain vital virtue flowing out of you; you will cast out death by rekindling where it was dying the glow and the gleam of life. To stand upon earth as THE TRUTH, and to bear witness to the truth, with no name, no power, authority, or influence recognized by the world, seemed to the Lord from Heaven the one kingly act. On this one basis He rested the right, and by this one force He wielded the power, of His kingdom; and that Truth to which He witnessed by death now rules the judgment of mankind.

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth;" and by standing, true to your own innermost nature, true to God, true to your eternal

future, conquer. Compel men to reverence in you the truth which you have learned from Christ, and which alone can rule them; which alone can make such order amidst earth's discords and confusions as reigns among the hosts who surround the Throne, and behold the face of God on high.

3. There is another and secondary use of the girdle, and with a word on that I close.

Primarily, the girdle is for compression, compactness, intensity of vital force and impact; but it serves a further use. It gathers up all the loose, fluttering garments and adornments which, streaming on the winds, exhaust the strength and entangle the steps of the combatant, and may trip him in the moment when his hand is outstretched to the prize. Gird up the loins with truth, and gird in all the loose streamers of desire and passion, all pinings for unreal, untrue good, which waste the energies of the soul, clog its progress, and in the end murder its life. Let nothing become essential to your life but that which lies in the truth, in the word of God, about its conduct. Bend no knee to sensual pleasure. Girt for battle, like Gideon's three hundred, stoop and lap for the moment the needed refreshment, then stand erect, ready to renew the march and to crush the foe. "Faint, yet pursuing," was said of them when

their long day's march was ending. Gird up your desires and appetites, your love of pleasure, your love of display, your love of luxury, your love of gold; gird them tightly, and hold them well in hand. "Faint, yet pursuing," shall be said of you too when your long day's battle and march are ending, and it needs but one brave stroke to master the everlasting victory.

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Gird up that wanton desire, that covetous lust, that loose habit of living, young man, young girl; it is crippling your energies, it is entangling your steps, it is draining your best heart's blood away; it will bury you a wreck in the pit at last. No! "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth," and strike world, and flesh, and devil prostrate at your feet.

III.

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"Stand therefore, having on the breastplate of righteousness."—*EPH. vi. 14.*

STAND, therefore. To stand against evil is to conquer. It has no substance, no inherent force. Evil is Babel—confusion. It constructs nothing, consolidates nothing. Organization, growth, fruit, belong to the region of life, of light. Evil is darkness, corruption, and death. It is nothing, save as it works on and in the will of a free being. To stand, to hold the will firm against it, is to conquer. "Get thee hence, Satan, thou hast nothing in me." One firm word, and the field is won. It is like a ghastly nightmare to a dreamer—awfully real while he dreams. He tosses, he moans, he screams in his agony. His limbs writhe, the sweat beads his brow. He has but to shake himself from slumber, to stand; it vanishes like vapour; no ghost even of a substance remains. We talk much of aggression in these days, of onset, of stern assault of the devil's citadel, of carrying the banner of the Cross far on into the realms of darkness and

death. Quite rightly. We are enlisted and armed for attack. The man who thinks to carry with him out of the field his own salvation simply, will be reckoned among the dead and not among the living in Jerusalem. "Come, ye blessed of my Father," is the welcome of disciples of a far loftier and more Christlike strain.

But the supreme act of aggression, after all, is to live. A life that is fed from the Divine spring, that is kindled from the life of Christ, is the supremely victorious force against evil, and the surest antidote to its deadly, damning work. A life which utters the confession, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me," carries conquest with it whenever it stands or moves. Life is light in this spiritual sphere. The life is the light of men. Wherever there is life which is quickened by Christ, there is the light of Christ. Light has but to shine, and darkness vanishes. Life has but to glow, and all that was passing into the domain of corruption thrills, throbs, pulsates, and is gathered up into the bright articulation of the living organism which, simply by living, casts out death. So those in whom faith is a living power scatter darkness and master death simply

by living. Their life exerts a quickening influence through all the sphere which they occupy. Wherever they are, they are soldiers of Christ, fighting His battle. Virtue goes forth from them by no act of will or effort; and whatever it touches it heals, sweetens, sanctifies, and saves. If a life in full tune with Christ could be set down, to bear its witness and to put forth its power, in every dark nook of our social world which we are trying to reach with the light of the Gospel, how many Committees, how many Associations, how many Mission Stations would it be worth ?

I am persuaded that Christian people make constantly a huge mistake in estimating the aggressive force of the Gospel, and the way in which it behoves them to bring it to bear on the overthrow of the works of the devil, and the rescue of souls from his accursed reign. Our measure is mainly the visible apparatus which we can set and keep in motion. We organize great institutions, and gather funds and forces from afar; we create a highly complex apparatus of distribution, by which, moving the mechanism from the centre, we can scatter abroad the gifts which we have gathered, and plant and guide the agencies by which we have high hope of accomplishing the work. Just in proportion to the magnitude and

multitude of the agencies which we can set and keep working, do we measure our aggression on the kingdom of darkness, and the help which we are bringing to the kingdom of the Lord. But, alas! the help may be all the other way; and we must not shut our eyes to the fact that it may be, and sometimes very manifestly is, the enemy's work and not the Master's that we are doing, when we set up our ponderous engines of assault. Many a grand enterprise, which began with high purpose and with great visible zeal for the kingdom of God, has been pressed by the very weight of its own mechanism into a quite lower region of influence, and has ended in the devil's service and not the Lord's.

Pure, righteous, gentle, patient, self-denying, Christlike life—this is the strongest weapon of our spiritual warfare. To stand up in the world as Jesus stood before Pilate, and to bear witness to the truth by living it, is to wield the victorious force before which the powers of darkness vanish like ghosts before the dawning; and it is this, the pure energy of life, which, when the final struggle comes, will win for Christ the empire of the world. Sadly enough we might look at all the vast and costly apparatus with which the Church has been assailing through all these ages the strongholds

of Satan, which stand as of old, and to the eye but little the weaker for the assault, did we not remind ourselves that the vital weapon, the armament of a living soul, full of the Divine light and fire, has been mainly laid up in the armoury since the Church called the world in to her aid. A life whence flashes and shocks issue forth against all that exalts itself against Christ, as light flows from the sun and magnetic streams, appears but rarely in our midst. But the work of one pure, Christlike, self-devoted life, when it does appear, though it may neither shout nor cry, nor make its voice heard in the streets, fills one with a bounding hope as to the possibilities of the future. One day a voice shall ring through this valley of dry bones which we name the Church, and to which we ministers feebly prophesy, loud, clear, inspiring, as the trumpet of God, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord," the glory of a heavenly life, "is risen upon thee."

And then, when the life shines clear and strong, shall "the Gentiles come to its light, and kings to the brightness of its rising;" then shall the fairest, brightest, most blessed vision that has ever gladdened the eyes of the heavenly watchers far up on the height, watching for the dawning that shall never die in darkness, fill all hearts

with joy and praise. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God, out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things have passed away." (Rev. xxi. 1—4.)

Stand therefore, and by standing triumph, "having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness." "By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left," writes St. Paul elsewhere of the furniture of the Christian warrior. It was by love that the Gospel won its way; it was by righteousness that it laid the deep and broad foundations on which the structure of Christian society rests. Perhaps there are no writings in the whole circle of human literature so charged

with the idea of righteousness as the Epistles of St. Paul. Critics who are bitterly, scornfully hostile to all that we hold to be a Gospel, yet find in the intense sense of righteousness which is characteristic of St. Paul, the key to that marvellous power over men which he wielded in his own day, and is wielding still in ours. They say that if we can but learn from St. Paul the lesson of righteousness, if we can but catch the glow of his righteous fervour, and the flash of his righteous glance, we have nothing more to learn from him ; we have sucked then the marrow of his Gospel, and may pass on to what they call sweeter and lighter schools.

And in a great sense they are right. The man who has learnt to be righteous in St. Paul's sense has little else to learn spiritually ; he shares the life and bears the image of the living and righteous God. And to learn it we must go, not to St. Paul, but to his Teacher and Master. The righteousness of God in Christ, is the root out of which all human righteousness to the measure of St. Paul must spring. Men speak of learning the lessons of righteousness, as if it were quite the simplest rudiment of the spiritual schools. It is the bond and firmament of all things. It is the foundation on which everything in this universe

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rests, which stands firm and strong out of the chaos of confusion. The righteous word of the righteous Lord hath founded the earth and established the heavens. To be righteous is to discover the secret of the universe; is to pierce its mystery; it is to be drawn into the concord of the universal life. It is man's last supreme attainment; it is the perfect fruit of his discipline; the crown of all the graces, the regal robe of all the powers. The flippant critics for once are right; learn righteousness, and you learn all that may become a spirit; *live it*, and you are made like unto the Son of God. The Apostles of light and sweetness are right; but it is not their Gospel, it is the Gospel of St. Paul.

Let us consider,—

I. The nature of righteousness.

Divines distinguish two kinds of righteousness, imputed and imparted, implanted, or inwrought righteousness. It is a sore puzzle to many a poor brain, these two kinds of a quality so simple, so pure, so divinely one, as righteousness. It has always seemed to us plain, from the nature of things, as well as from the teaching of St. Paul, that what God imputes as righteousness must have the germinal principle of righteousness in it. He imputes it because it is there; because to Him

seed is as flower and fruit. The breastplate of righteousness St. Paul writes about. Clearly not imputed righteousness, say the Commentators with almost unanimous voice; clearly that inward righteousness of soul out of which a righteous walk and work must spring. But how if that faith which God imputes as righteousness be the very germ and spring of that inward righteousness; so that the righteousness with which we are to arm ourselves as a breastplate, is the fruit within us of that living faith in the righteous Saviour, which is imputed to us as righteousness by God? It is God's righteousness, because it is born of and inevitably grows up to the righteousness of God in Him.

But to leave the technical terms of theology, which have been dinned into men's ears till they have come to think that Christ is a creed, what is this righteousness wherewith we are to arm ourselves and shield both lungs and heart from harm? I have said that righteousness is a main burden of all the writings of the Apostles. Why? It is worth our while to consider in seeking the answer how largely, how profoundly, it enters into the life of the people who nursed him and sent him forth to proclaim it to the world. The Jew, too, believed in righteousness. All his inspired teachers

testified of it; and it was always in Jewish estimation the counterpart of some Divine original in God. The righteous God was behind, was within, the righteous man of the Jewish Scriptures. If you seize on this intense idea of righteousness as the secret spring of St. Paul's tremendous power, you must remember also that a long course of revelation, of unveiling of the righteous God, had raised the idea to such glorious maturity and energy in the Jewish heart. The Jew at any rate, of whose whole moral inheritance Paul was the heir (Gal. i. 13, 14), had not evolved righteousness out of his inner consciousness, nor distilled it as the essence of the order of the world. It was distinctly from God that he learnt it, through God that he cherished it, and to God that he owed it; as with the life of his physical frame, this higher life of his spirit was begun, continued, and ended in God. I am not questioning for a moment the existence of native righteous instincts, convictions, and purposes in man. I only say that the people whose culture St. Paul inherited, and the Apostle himself, had this doctrine of righteousness consciously through a living faith in a righteous God and Saviour. The language of their prophets was, "The just shall live by faith."

And I know no other righteousness which can

be an armour to the soul, than this of which faith in the righteous God is the root. I am far from meaning by this faith in God a conviction that there is a righteous Being of awful power, who can reward the just with infinite pleasure, and torment the transgressor with infinite pain. It is rather the sense within of a Godward yearning, a Godward aspiration; the knowledge that man was made in the image of his righteous Maker; that to grow into that image is the bliss and glory of man's being, to grow out of it his shame and death. And this is of faith. "The just by faith" are the living. It is acknowledged on all hands that St. Paul grasped this idea of righteousness with marvellous tenacity, and that he brought it to bear on men with tremendous force. It is well worth our while thus to remind ourselves where and how he learnt it. We see that he inherited it from ages, millenniums of spiritual culture, the whole basis of which was the firm belief that a God of infinite goodness, truth, and righteousness was revealing Himself to our race. I dare not judge the righteousness of those who profess to have cut themselves off from all the supports which belief in the living and true God can afford to a human spirit. I doubt altogether the reality of this cutting of the

communications between man and the spiritual world. I doubt the power of man to insulate himself as a spiritual being, and to abide unmoved amid the influences of the spiritual sphere. The truth of the Gospel has so thoroughly inwrought itself into the woof of the thought, the belief, and the habits of Christendom, that a man may just as truly shut his eyes and deny the sunlight, as shut his heart and deny the good which he gets from God.

But stand ye, brethren, "having on the breastplate of righteousness;" God's righteousness, implanted by God, and strengthening itself in Him. Arm yourself in your endeavour after righteous living with the conviction that the living God, who quickeneth all things, who holds the stars in His right hand and rules the motions of all the worlds, loves it, honours it, and is bound to maintain it, and to crown it in His own wise way, in His own good time. Doing justly, living righteously, seeking the truth, having no trust in, no hope from, anything but the good, believe that the eternal God is with you, and that however you may suffer, however long may be the patience which He demands from you, however sharp and stern the discipline with which He exercises you, the right *must* triumph, the

righteous *must* be blessed. Sustain yourself through your private personal struggle by the assurance that it is the war of Heaven against Hell, of Light against Darkness, of Cosmos against Chaos, of Life against Death, of God against the Devil, in which you are playing your solemn part; and believe that, in loving righteousness and hating iniquity, like Christ, you are winning a part in an everlasting and glorious victory. Righteousness, the right as God sees it, as the soul of man sees it when he lifts up his heart to God and cries for light, put on as a breastplate, and so stand.

II. The breastplate.

It guards the lungs and the heart, the seat of the vital fire. The breastplate is perhaps the most important part of the defensive armour—defensive armour on a living warrior being but, as we have seen, the provision for more vigorous and effectual assault. The loins are the head of the limbs; the heart, which the breastplate guards, is the home and shrine of the life. The heart and the lungs together control the whole circulation of the life blood; all that vivifies the system, all that kindles and inspires. If you want the currents of your life to flow pure and free, if you want the glow of health to tingle in your veins,

the flush to mantle in your cheek, the light to kindle in your eye, love righteousness, and cleave to it whatever it may cost. Nothing can so make glad and buoyant the heart within you as to feel that it beats behind that breastplate; that you are engaged in a work and are fulfilling a purpose which your own inmost soul approves, on which God smiles, with which all things on earth and in heaven are working, and which *must* bear blessed fruit at last. Gird yourself with the breastplate of right thought, right desire, right aim—a rightness which your own soul dares to search to the depths, and then move freely, the heart is armed at every point and against every shock. You may be assailed, smitten, wounded, but that breastplate guards the heart and its treasures; and it bears the life with all its victorious energies, with strong pulse and full inspiration, into the arena, to wrestle against the rulers of the darkness of the world, who are making a Babel of confusion or a hell of discord on the earth which the Lord died to redeem and wills to save.

The man who has the single concern, as Paul had, to know the will of the Lord that he may do it, who is purged of all selfish vanity and lust by faith, finds free and joyous play for the vital organs. It is like breathing the pure, keen air

of the upper regions, it quickens the heartbeats and the flow of the vital currents, it exhilarates unspeakably the joy of life. And was there ever a righteous work which had not its envious, carping detractors? Calumny seems to attend on goodness and nobleness as shadows attend on substance; but the inward sense of a true and honest heart about the matter, not only guards the soul from all rankling wounds, but conquers, and shames the detractors down. A steady, quiet, earnest persistence in right-doing, with the eye fixed fairly on the hand of God, inevitably triumphs. It is simply irresistible. The one thing that men love and reverence ultimately is righteousness. Full of perverseness as are the judgments and the consciences of men, the heart, much as it may quiver, settles finally to that pole-star. The real leader and master of men is the man who knows and does the truth.

Arm yourself thus, and then face calmly whatever life and the world may bring to you. "Who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Nay, who is he that shall resist you? It is not a question of safety only; but of mastery; the man armed with the breastplate of righteousness is the easy master in his world. The evil-doer, the man who "loveth and

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maketh a lie," is building a Babel to his own inevitable confusion. The laws of the whole universe are against it; the current of things is against it; the face of God is against it, to cut off the very remembrance of it from the earth. Its builder, if he will not be warned, must lie buried in its overthrow at last. Wrong-doing strips the breast bare; it exposes it to constant wounds and shattering shocks. The man has an enemy behind every tree and in every shadow, who has a purpose in his heart which he dares not carry to God and ask Him to bless. Nothing can save him from overthrow. *His* doom, at any rate, is written in the book of the stars.

Bid farewell to a quiet, trustful, hopeful mind when you forsake God's kingdom and righteousness and begin to found your own. But believe, have faith, and you pass at once out of the shadow into a warm burst of sunlight. There is a glow within you kindling and thrilling through all the channels of your being, which were growing cold and numb under the touch of the hand of death. The heart beats freely, the lungs draw full inspirations, the man stands, and lifts up his face to meet the smile on the face of God. You begin to understand then what you were made and meant for; why God sent you here with that fearful and

wonderful endowment of freedom, and with such tremendous issues hanging on the decisions of your will. There may be those who shall read these words who are asking, while they read, in anguish of heart, "My God, why am I alive? Why hast Thou made me thus? Why must I bear this burden of my freedom, which my weak will and eager passion are ever abusing to my shame and destruction?"

'I, a child of vain aspirings,
Futile will and broken faith,
Fierce regrets and frenzied strivings,
Pressed by peril, pain, and death;'

how can I seek Thy righteousness? How can I serve in Thy kingdom? Let me alone; my nature and my destiny lie in a quite lower and darker sphere!"

Rely, believe, have faith in God, in Him whose cross reveals the Father, and the burden is lifted on the instant. Life unfolds its benign and blessed meanings; you rise for ever out of the region which is haunted by the spectre of the pit; you begin to believe that the day may dawn when you shall realize that it is a blessed thing to be. Do bravely and steadily the right thing which is next your hand; say not in your heart, who shall ascend into heaven to bring down this far off

righteousness from above ; or who shall descend into the depth to bring it up from beneath ; the word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart ; and the work is there, close by thee, near thy hand. Do that right thing, a little thing it may be, which lies next to thee, which needs to be done now, perhaps which has been long waiting to be done ; do it because it is right, because God loves it, because Christ demands it in the name of His great mercy, because whatever it may cost you now and here, Christ will honour and crown it in the great day of manifestation ; and then the clouds which have gathered around you and have threatened to bury your struggling spirit will begin to scatter, and a light will dawn on the night of your sorrow and conflict, which will brighten at length into the everlasting day. The life will begin to beat strong in your pulses, and the glow of health to tingle in your limbs. You will have earned and won the right to cry with a voice of irrepressible exultation, in the midst of the storm and struggle through which Christ's soldier of duty must fight his way to his home and his rest, " Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

IV.

THE FOOTSTEPS OF PEACE.

- “And your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace.”—EPH. vi. 15.

“HOW beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring glad tidings, and that publish peace.” “Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.” Once the voice of an angelic song was heard streaming down from celestial mountains on the storm-vexed air: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill to men.” Peace, then, is God’s most blessed gift; it is Heaven’s richest benediction. It expresses more perfectly than anything else of which man has hoped and dreamed, that condition of things in which his heart can find full satisfaction, and his intellect the fair unfolding of its powers. One is fairly weary of the word “ideal.” Every school has its ideal; every man is talking about his ideal, which seems too constantly to mean the decent evasion of the actual claims and needs of all things around for present and practical service; else one might

say that the word "peace" expresses most perfectly the ideal condition of human society. There was peace in Eden, but the moment that the beautiful and joyous vision of the far past which the Scripture paints for us was broken up by sin, and man was driven forth to face the stern realities of his wilderness lot, peace vanished with it. Storm, strife, and bloody death took possession of the theatre of man's history, and they have been the chief visible actors on the stage from that day until now.

Peace means something more for us, after all these stormy ages, than the restoration of the unconscious serenity and concord of Eden; just as the child-like man, whom the Lord designates as the true child of the kingdom, implies something more, something higher, larger, deeper, stronger, more lasting, more fruitful, than the half-conscious simplicity of childhood, which is yet its prophetic image. Peace to man, after all these ages of storm and strife, of bloody conflict, of tormenting discord, through which humanity has struggled wearily on its way, means something unspeakably beautiful and blessed. It means the final taming and the firm control by an enlightened and purified will of all the selfish greed and lawless passion, which have made the tracks of

our proud civilisation one great field of blood; it means the throning of righteousness, God's righteousness—a righteousness which receives its law from Heaven, and rules itself by the eternal standards—in all human consciences; it means the occupation by human society of that basis of fellowship, of concord, of concert between man and man, which was laid by God in the very constitution of our nature, and which God's Word rediscovers to us in bearing witness against that sin by which it was obscured; it means governments purely, justly, wisely observant of the true welfare of the people; it means peoples loyally resting in the wise and provident care of their rulers, and sustaining their hands by intelligent concert in all that concerns the public good; it means the rich and powerful firmly convinced that they are the stewards and ministers of a great trust which has been committed to them; it means poor men conscious that justice reigns in the hearts of their social superiors, and that everything is done which in the nature of things can be done, and this is what the poor have a right to demand, to give a fair course to their powers. It means the nations of the world bound in the bands of a universal brotherhood, a great humanity of which they are the limbs and organs,

in whose weal they are made glad, by whose woe they are made sad, having the same care and charge of each other's well-being, as eye has of hand and brain of heart in this fleshly tabernacle; a brotherhood in which, as in a shrine, a spirit abides which was born from a higher world than this, and shall survive its wreck; it means love, divine love—and there is no other love pure enough and deep enough to satisfy all human claims and needs—filling all hearts with tenderness, all eyes with meekness, all hands with ministry, all lips with truth, all homes, all tribes, all nations, with peace. It means the day when the tabernacle of God shall be with men, when “righteousness and praise shall spring forth before all the nations,” when “they shall plant the old wastes, and repair the former desolations,” when “the wilderness and the solitary place shall be made glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;” when “all tears shall be wiped off all faces,” and the days of the mourning of humanity shall be ended for ever.

Dreams! idle dreams! exclaim the philosophers. Well, give me the dreams rather than that weary waste of desolation, in which man's highest aspiration must be for annihilation, to which, if this nihilism be the truth, they would reduce the

world. But I have not yet taught myself to believe that the things which man most firmly grasps, and to which he most tenaciously clings, are the dreams of his existence; while the things which he dreads, and from which he instinctively shrinks, are the only solid realities with which he has to do. Nothing can ever tempt me to believe that the hopes with which man has fed the hunger of his heart, and has nourished his strength for struggle through all the ages of his stormy progress, which his seers have seen for him and his poets have sung, and which his God has held ever as his great inspiration before his sight, are but mocking spectres which haunt the long dark night of his pilgrimage, while dust and rottenness are the only things on earth which endure.

Young friends, distrust, shudder at such teaching. By its fruits ye shall know it. Measure all that it robs you of, and set in the other scale all which it offers in its room, and say, Get thee behind me, Satan! thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things which be of dust and darkness, and which stink of the pit! But if these be dreams, it is a marvellous fact that not the theologians only, the Christian thinkers who gather their truth and inspiration from the Word of God, but the world's chief rulers and states-

men cling to them with such intense tenacity. A golden age of peace and plenty, of material and social happiness, has been the promise held forth by every great revolution which has helped forward the progress of the world. All the great world-conquerors, the city-burners, as a sardonic philosopher calls them, have told the world that peace was their great object; one empire, ruled by one strong hand, giving by one just law the only security for the peace and prosperity of mankind. It is the universal dream of empire. Every great party, every great master of men, has made peace, a real, solid, lasting peace, the chief feature of his promise. *L'Empire c'est la paix* is substantially the language of all the "saviours of society" in all ages of the world.

Read the language in which the poet of the war-weary Roman world salutes the Augustan empire. It is almost a paraphrase of the glorious golden words with which Prophet and Psalmist in the Jewish Scriptures salute the vision of Messiah's blessed and peaceful reign. The place which Virgil held in the estimation of pious Churchmen through the mediæval period, in which pagan and devilish were almost convertible terms, is mainly due to the almost prophetic character of the visions which the poet paints for

his war-weary countrymen, of the restoration of the blessed Saturnian reign. Peace expresses the deepest longing, the strongest aspiration of man's social heart. No great human manifesto has ever dared to dispense with it. Why, each new party leader in poor tormented, bankrupt Spain, is sure to have, not peace only, but all the blessed things of which I have spoken, in his official programme. The great Republican party in Europe has peace and all manner of beautiful words emblazoned on its banner. The writings of Mazzini are among the purest and noblest pleas for peace and all the prosperities which grow out of it, which have been given to the world since the days of the Apostles. The very Commune in Paris had a wonderful prospect of purity, peace, and universal prosperity, behind that fiery cloud which made the vision glare on Europe like an emanation from the pit. Peace, all parties, all factions, all peoples, strive, groan, and pray for; in peace alone can they see their aspirations fulfilled and humanity at rest. But then their peace, their happy island of the blessed estate of men and of nations, has one dark feature which makes men shudder from it while they gaze—it lies beyond seas of blood. One grand, final struggle, one tremendous purifying war, one desperate uprising of humanity in its

grandeur and terror—and then the Millennium! Alas! it is a peace to be conquered by grape-shot with all of them. How blessed in contrast are the Gospel words! they come down on us soft, serene, as the Sabbath bells on the calm evening air: “Let your feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.”

I. The preparation of the Gospel of peace. What does it mean?

In spite of the deservedly high authority of men like Olshausen and Alford, I must believe that it means a mind prepared to preach the Gospel of peace, prepared to bear the “glad tidings of great joy” to men. Let your feet be shod with it; let men hear the ring of the good news in your footsteps as you move about the world. A singular instance of the way in which men miss the truth by looking at vital things as they appear on paper, and not as they may be seen in life, is furnished by the commentary of a man as large-minded and far-sighted as Olshausen on our text. He is so hampered by the notions of defensive armour that he writes thus about the passage: “It was natural to interpret the *ἐτοιμασία*, as it is brought into parallel with the *ὑποδήμασι*, of the readiness to proclaim the Gospel of peace; as besides Chrysostom, Œcumenius, Theophylact,

and Grotius. Luther, too, translates it "ready to promote the Gospel of peace." But that readiness cannot possibly be compared with a weapon, and that, too, a weapon of defence; the propagation of the Gospel is here a very remote idea. Had Olshausen, instead of looking at the word defensive as it appears on paper, set before his mind's eye a living warrior armed *cap à pied*, he would have seen that the very purpose of his armour was to make his onset more terrible and resistless to the foe. It might then, too, perhaps have crossed his mind that preparedness to preach the Gospel of peace, the aspect of a messenger of good tidings, whose very footsteps ring with the message, is one of the very mightiest of weapons for breaking down that listlessness and despair, which are the devil's locks and bars on the prison-house of souls.

Hear, too, such a wise man as Alford: "Nor again can it mean 'preparedness to preach the Gospel,' for the persons addressed were not teachers, but the whole Church." He had strangely forgotten, when he wrote those words, that the whole Church is constantly appealed to as the witness for the truth in the New Testament as in the Old. The Christian, and not the official teacher only, is the steward and minister of the manifold grace of

God under the Gospel, and is bound as his most sacred duty to publish the glad news abroad. I must hold with Chrysostom, Grotius, and Luther, that the attitude and the aspect of joyful preachers of the Gospel, the bearing of men on tip-toe as it were with eagerness and hope, is the point at which the Apostle is aiming in this somewhat obscure phrase, "Your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." "There was great joy in that city" to which the preacher (not an Apostle) bore the glad tidings; men saw and felt that the messengers came laden with blessing; they opened to them joyfully both their homes and their hearts. The common people heard Jesus gladly. "The Lord hath visited His people," they cried, when they heard the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. Once they tore down branches of trees, and stripped off their garments, and flung them before His advancing footsteps; while the air rang with the shouts, "Hosanna! hosanna! blessed be the King that cometh to us in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."

His feet were "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace."

II. The Gospel of peace.

The peace for which all hearts are pining, the

peace for which society has been for ages, for millenniums, striving, and for which humanity has been willing to lavish both tears and blood, was seen once for a moment in a little company in an upper chamber at Jerusalem; whose life in their fellowship with each other was the most heavenlike thing which had ever gladdened longing eyes and hearts in the history of the world. The spirit which for the moment made that little company one, with a oneness more of heaven than of earth, full of tender care of each other, full of ministry, full of charity, full of love to man, to God, full of a passionate desire to help, to bless, and to save mankind, we are to receive and to bear throughout the earth. That is the spirit of peace; the spirit of faith and rest in God. "We which have believed do enter into rest." But "whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not of your lusts?" Cast out this lusting demon; grow like to the helpful angels. Care supremely for the good of which there is no private possession; which is an infinite treasure that all may have, and it is infinite still; and you set your foot upon the very neck of the demon of discord, and win the power to bear with you an atmosphere of peace and serenity wherever you move.

This is the Gospel of peace, because it establishes peace in the very centre and core of man's being. It makes him at one with God in the innermost and most potential organs of his life. Atonement means attunement; verily, atonement is the marrow of the Gospel. It teaches man to love the truth, to maintain righteousness, to believe in God, to hate a lie, to resist the devil, and to live in tune with the life of heaven. And then peace settles on his spirit, as when a child who has been lost in the night, weary, cold, and hungry, sobs himself to sleep in his mother's arms; or when a son who has been wallowing in a prodigal's pleasures and writhing in a prodigal's shame, finds himself forgiven, a child tenderly loved and cherished, in the father's home again, where he may resume with profound yet humble joy all the activities of his higher life. It is the Gospel of peace, because it assails at once and at the heart that evil, passionate, lustful nature which is the fountain of all the misery of man and of the world. It makes peace between man and God, and that carries in its bosom peace with all that is of God, while it gives to man the power to breathe the benediction of peace around him wherever he moves.

And the world heard this Gospel gladly, for it

promised a real deliverance. Man knows that he carries the real curse of his being within him. He knows that the source of all the distraction that rends society lies in the lust, the passion, and the selfishness of human hearts. And when men who have overcome that world, who have entered into the peace which passeth all understanding, and have become blessed peacemakers wherever they move, tell their fellow-men from God that within them is the source of the evil, and that by grace, the grace of the Lord Jesus, it may be purged out of their hearts, a great joy, a great hope springs up within. They seem to breathe and move in the blessed atmosphere of the benediction, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good courage, I have overcome the world."

III. "Have your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace."

The image seems at first sight a strange one, but I am persuaded that it is profoundly significant. A man can write or beckon with his hand,

or he can shout with his voice from a distance, but with the foot goes inevitably the man himself. The image seems to me to point—

I. To the kind of activity by which God seeks to establish His kingdom in the world.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring glad tidings, and that publish peace.” Not how beautiful is their voice from far, dropping down like the angel-song from the height; but how beautiful are their *feet*, bringing their presence as living persons; voice, look, gesture, mind, heart, all laid a willing sacrifice on the altar of ministry to man. And here we come back to the principle on which in the former discourses I have dwelt at large. The one thing on which God relies for the regeneration of human society is spiritual life. The institutions which grow out of a deeper and purer life are blessed helps to the work of reformation; they secure and edify what has already been gained. But the institutions which are intended to produce the work of reformation, the new arrangements of society out of which it is hoped that the regeneration will grow, are dangerous snares. These new schemes of social organization are the quicksands on which many a noble and passionate effort to save society has gone to wreck. By men,

living men, who are in tune with His thought, and are quickened by His spirit, who share His hope and purpose of salvation, who know that they are called, nay, are born to minister, who having freely received feel themselves bound freely to give; in other words, by men whose "feet are shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace," God saves mankind.

I have said that peace is the dream of every party, of every faction, of every great ruler and conqueror who has ever lorded it over mankind. But it is always a peace which the sword has to conquer; it lies beyond seas of strife and blood. Take ye, not a sword to conquer it, but the glowing emanation of your living spirit; while your feet bear about the peace-lover and the peace-maker wherever you move. Let your feet be shod with it. Let the ring of it in your footsteps prepare your way. Preach down by lip, by life, vanity, selfishness, injustice, envy, cruelty, lust; all out of which wars, strifes, seditions, discords spring. Preach up by lip, by life, truth, righteousness, meekness, temperance, gentleness, charity; all by which peace is established and blessedness grows. Let the music of your footsteps, as the lovers of peace, the seekers of peace, the ministers of peace, who have given themselves to the work

of teaching, helping, blessing, and saving mankind, be the chime that

“Rings out the darkness of the age ;
Rings in the Christ that is to be.”

2. See how this weaves itself in with the rest of the panoply.

These preachers of peace must have their “loins girt about with truth.” They must know the truth of their Christian calling; and as those who are called of God and sent of God, they must open their message to their fellow-men. No meaner motive, no lower strength will bear the strain of this ministry. It is in the name of God and by the word of God that these peacemakers must do their work. And their armour of proof is the breastplate of righteousness. A righteous, unselfish, loving desire and purpose does win man’s confidence, it unlocks the door of his heart, it breathes an atmosphere of peace in the homes and the fellowships which it enters, while it makes beautiful the footsteps of very poor, humble, weary, wayworn pilgrims, as they pass on their errands of mercy along the pathways of the world.

Blessed are the peacemakers, who rebuke strife and all that gives birth to strife by their righteous, loving, ministering presence. God multiply the company of such preachers; the world needs them

sorely. The voice of them that strive for mastery do we hear; the clank of arms is on the air. A dark thought sometimes crosses one, that the only peace into which humanity seems likely to settle, is the peace of exhaustion; and the only quiet, the quiet of death. The thought would fill one with sad forebodings but for the history of the past, the record of all that the preachers of peace have accomplished for the world. But strife and the seeds of strife are everywhere. Why, you can hardly get a company of Christian workers together, confederate for the most sacred objects, but strife breaks out among them. And whence the strife? Vanity, self-will, the desire to make a party and to rule a party, envy, jealousy, and all the beggarly devil's arts and instruments, by which sooner or later God's work in the world seems never to fail to be marred.

"Put on therefore the whole armour of God."
"Let your loins be girt about with truth, and put on the breastplate of righteousness." Take a righteous, unselfish purpose, and shame it all. In the presence of truth, righteousness, and love, discord pales and dies. "Let your feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." Bear glad tidings, good words of God, in your aspect wherever you move. Subdue wrong by righteousness,

charm envy by goodness, hush passion by gentleness, tame violence by meekness, slay hate by love. Make it your work to win the world, your little world, your home, your comrades, your people, as far as your voice can reach them, to peace, by winning them to truth, to righteousness, and to God. "Let the same mind be in you which was likewise in Christ Jesus," and which made His word God's message of peace and benediction to all whose ear was open to His voice, as He moved, the Incarnate glad tidings, about the world. And if life seems hard, the strain long, the work sad, and the way bare; if the Marahs seem abundant, while the Elims with the palm-trees and fountains are few; if you are tempted to faint and to murmur, to cry, "All these things are against me," and to hold, your peace, "even from good," then look up, look on;—bethink you how beautiful one day, how beautiful for ever, on the celestial mountains, will be the feet of them that *have* brought glad tidings, and *have* published peace.

V.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH.

"Above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."
—*EPH.* vi. 16.

ST. PAUL sketches for us, in the whole passage from which our text is taken, the portrait of the Christian soldier armed for onset. The whole movement and pressure of this passage is, as we have seen, aggressive. It presents the warrior armed, not for defence, but for defiance; the war is to be carried into the enemy's country; the sword-stroke is to be swift and trenchant against man's great enemy and God's. This is one side of the picture: the soldier under the inspiration of his great enterprise, Christ's crusader with the cross upon his brow, thrilling with enthusiasm, aglow with ardour, panting for the conflict, and assured of a rapid and easy victory.

But there is another side to the picture. "Nay, but we will go up," said the children of Israel once in a moment of high excitement; the next, they were flying, a broken, beaten rabble, before

their foes. Moments come, too, to the boldest when the strain relaxes, when the tension fails, when the mass and force of the foe seem to be overwhelming, and when "Who is sufficient for these things?" breaks sadly from the bravest combatant's lips. Moments of panic occur in the battle. The fiery darts come raining around the soldier; in front, around, behind, he is beset by a dense mass of assailants. He loses for a moment the banner of his leader; the shout of his fellow-combatants comes fainter and fainter on his ear. He seems to be cut off from the main array of the battle; isolated, helpless, he is fighting alone against a great army of foes. A panic seizes him. He drops his sword-arm, the missiles rain against every joint and crack of his harness; wounded, bleeding, faint, frightened, he retreats, and prepares to fly.

What soldier of Christ has not known such seasons of doubt, depression, and nascent despair? The foe seems nearer than the Captain; shame and death than glorious victory. "Oh! let me now die, for I am not better than my fathers." The battle of life, the battle of humanity, is lost; the enemy triumphs along the whole line; let death seize my worthless life; let me hide my shame and sorrow in the dust. The very bravest,

strongest soldiers of the Cross have breathed this moan, in moments of humiliation and anguish ; and when we measure man's miserable weakness and the terrible pressure of the forces of evil that assail him, the marvel is, the miracle is, that the moan is not universal, and that the pall of black despair has not settled on all the joy and hope of the world: If Paul could cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" if Elijah could moan, "Let me now die;" if the Lord could be so crushed by the tremendous anguish of the conflict as to pray with strong cries and tears, the beads of blood-sweat on His brow, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" what common soldier in the host can hope to march with assured, triumphant step to victory? No: "Without are fightings, within are fears," is the experience of most of us. And the fears are traitors in the camp, ready to unlock the citadel; or flaws in the breastplate, through which the enemy's missile can find easy passage to the heart.

What is to be done with them, these fears within us? The inward sinking of courage and hope; the sense of weakness, worthlessness, helplessness, which sometimes overshadows us with oppressive gloom; the thought, it is all a delusion, a dream of the imagination—our call, our

Captain, our enterprise, our hope—which the devil is ever suggesting, and not always fruitlessly, to our souls. I would not give much for the reality and depth of that man's experience who has never felt with something like an agony of terror, his hold on the unseen things which he has made the rulers in his house of life relaxing ; who has never heard with a shudder the whisper of the tempter, " Fool, it's all a shadow that you are grasping at—eat, drink, and die." And there is but one weapon that can meet it, can guard the soul from the suggestion which will dry up all its strength and courage in the springs, burning all before it, and leaving the life a blackened, blasted field of desolation—the saddest thing in the universe that meets the eye of Heaven—" Above all, take the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

I. FAITH.—The Apostles, whatever else they were or were not, were at any rate men who believed and therefore spake, and in the strength of their faith wrought all their transcendent work. Transcendent I call it. It stands by itself in history. Many movements have record in history which are of the same essential nature as the great movement of the Apostolic times.

Men of faith, working a mighty deliverance, a mighty reformation for mankind. But this movement simply transcends them, it climbs to loftier heights, it reaches to deeper depths, than they touched; while it is destined to rise into the clear heaven of the new Creation, and to fill eternity with joy and praise. If the Incarnation is a reality; if we "have not followed cunningly devised fables in making known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," we must believe that this is the movement to which all other efforts and achievements of the human spirit are either preparatory or auxiliary; that with this Kingdom of Heaven, which is briefly the kingdom of all believers, God has visibly associated Himself; that it is His enterprise for the salvation of the world.

And from first to last it is of faith. Its men, its disciples, subjects, soldiers, are all believers. Its children shall "live by faith." "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Its proclamation everywhere, its summons to its subjects, its rebels, is, "Repent, and believe the Gospel." "Sirs, what must we do?" cried men in an agony of apprehension; "Believe on the

Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Faith stands foremost on its list of spiritual graces—nay, faith is at the root of them; not a grace, but the nourishment of all graces, because it is the organ by which the Divine life flows down, and circulates in men and in the world. Paul was emphatically a man of faith; a man to whom God was an ever-present and living reality, to whom the things of the unseen world were more substantial than the earthly things with which he had daily and hourly to do. Once his life had suffered a wonderful and complete transformation. From being the fiercest persecutor, he became the most able and glorious preacher of the Church. His one account of the transformation was, "I saw Jesus;" that vision of faith made a new era in his life, and in the life of mankind.

This faith had been the distinguishing quality of the great lawgivers, prophets, heroes, and princes of his race,—a race of royal faculty and of splendid achievements. How many of them, being dead, are speaking to us mightily still! And faith was their grand endowment; as men who believed, who "endured as seeing Him who is invisible;" who had the living God always before them, they spake, wrought, and triumphed in the world. Paul, or some Pauline

man, in the Hebrews, gives a long and glorious catalogue of their names and heroic deeds ; names dear to all the ages of Christendom ; some of them destined to be dear to all the ages of eternity. These all lived in faith, and "died in faith," looking "for a city which hath foundations, eternal in the heavens, whose builder and maker is the Lord." Paul was the heir of their culture, of all the ardour kindled by their heroic lives. Faith was the one animating, inspiring principle of his career. "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day."

And here the very core of the Apostle's faith is laid bare. I know, not *what*, but *whom* I have believed. To him God was a presence as familiar, as beloved, as to David. He lived in His presence ; he constantly heard His voice ; he referred to Him the conduct of his daily pilgrimage ; he had His warrant for everything which he attempted to do. If he was weak and weary, God was a fountain of everlasting strength to him ; if he was tempted, God was his refuge and shield ; if he was wounded in the battle, God was his ready helper and healer ; if he was in distress, perplexity, despondency, God was his inspiring and unerring guide. At no moment, in no con-

dition, under no pressure, was God absent from him. When in his old age, as the shadows fell around him, and the work to which he had given his life, and was about to give his heart's blood, began to be troubled and marred, it was to God that he turned himself with yet loftier hope and exaltation. "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me . . . and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

It was just this intensely vivid sense of the reality of God's presence, God's interest in the world, God's action on the world, God's work for the world, and God's hope for the world, which made the Apostles' ministry so mighty, so triumphant; and lent to their impact on the world a momentum which for eighteen centuries has been the master force in governing the movements of human society. It is this faith, the faith which inspired them, which made them Apostles, which made them more than conquerors in their battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil in their times, that St. Paul prays you to take as your shield. Only believe, and all things in the way of defence and of victory become possible to you. "Set the Lord always before

you" as your God. Believe in your personal call and charge. Hear Him say to you as He said to Moses, "I know thee by name, and thou hast found grace in my sight." Feel the touch of His living hand as He says, "Fear thou not: I am with thee, I will strengthen thee, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Be sure that "like as a father pitieth his children" the Lord pities you, cares for you, with tender compassion; while He counts the infirmities, the sins, the shameful failures, that bow you to the dust, but fresh claims on His infinite mercy and love. Be sure that He holds in His firm hand all the hostile influences that assail and distress you, measures the range of their power to harm you, and your power to endure, and will never suffer you to be overpressed. Believe in His loving care for the great Creation, in His righteous rule, in His perfect, though dark and far-reaching, method of ordering all things to secure His blessed and glorious ends. Through the clouds and darkness which are round about Him, behold Him fulfilling with calm unfaltering purpose the wise and loving counsels of His will. Remember that the love which trod the streets of Galilee and Jerusalem through a martyr life, and died at last on Calvary a victim death, is the

only measure of the place which you hold in the scheme of the Creation, in the Father's home and heart.

And if a man must see to believe, see the Father in the suffering man who is yet the brightness of His glory, and the fulness of His life and love. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Believe that though the Lord hides Himself, He is never absent; that there is sympathetic pain in His heart with all that you endure. That He knows your soul to the very depths, its needs, its weaknesses, its sores, its shame, its sin; and has taken on Himself the whole charge and burden of its deliverance, its culture, its training, for the work and the joy of His Eternal Kingdom. Believe that, if your faith holds firm, the whole force of the universe, were it arrayed against you, could not separate you from His life and the destiny which it claims for you. Believe that there is nothing in the world, in all the worlds, which can compare with His benediction, with His support of your soul and your cause, if you are overpressed and overborne when you are about the Master's work. Believe that all worlds, if you had them, could not yield to you one pure draught of joy, if you were to hear the words, "Depart from me, I

never knew you," from His lips at last. Take to yourself the shield of faith, and stand. "Here stand I," said one, "I can do no other. God help me." Standing thus, girt with truth and shielded with faith, the man who said those words shook the world. "Stand, therefore." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith."

II. The shield of faith.

The shield is distinctly defensive armour. It is the piece with which the notion of defence most naturally associates itself. It seems to me to point distinctly to the myriad influences which beset the spiritual combatant in the battle, and which, if they once seize on him, weaken his hold on all the invisible things to which he clings, lower the tone of his zeal, courage, and ardour, fill him with fear and confusion, with doubt of himself and doubt of all things, and in the end murder his hope.

It is against them that he needs the shield. I hold that the main thought of the Apostle here concerns the effective force of the Christian, as Christ's soldier against the devil and against his works. It is not mainly, or even chiefly, the question, as to how these missiles of the devil affect him in his own experience, depress and

sadden him, and rob him of his joy and hope in Christ; it is rather the weakening of the arm of the soldier for the battle, the wasting of the force that might have rendered noble service to the kingdom of God, that occupies the Apostle's thoughts. It is the loss to the army rather than to the man which is here in question; and the fiery darts of the devil are the haunting, harassing, paralysing thoughts which beset a man in his spiritual work, and make many a noble life, in this world at any rate, an utter and disastrous wreck.

"The fiery darts." It is a powerful and expressive image. There are thoughts that not only bury the energy, the zeal, the joyous activity of the soul, but waste the soul itself as if the blast of a simoom had swept over it; killing not only its fruit, but the power of production in the very springs. There are states of doubt, unbelief, and despair, which leave the being scorched and bare, like the scene of a conflagration, with ghastly wrecks of what were once goodly and beautiful things grinning horribly over the waste. Let a man who has been zealous for Christ and for mankind lose his faith, let the fiery darts of the devil burn the communications of his soul with the spiritual world, and leave

him without God and without hope, and you may see the saddest wreck, the dreariest desert of despair, that the angels look upon. Remember the awful anguish of the death struggle of Jerusalem; the saddest passage of this world's history. I think that I have seen the likeness of it in an apostate's death.

Let us look at this a little in detail; let us survey the nature, and estimate the danger, of some of these fiery darts of the devil which fill the air in our days.

III. "The fiery darts of the wicked one."

1. I set first the sense of the unreality of spiritual things and the spiritual world, which so many of the influences of our modern life tend to generate. It is not the cry of a gross and sensual age, "What is my profit if I serve the Lord?" It is a darker and deadlier question, which an intellectual and keenly critical age forces on us, Is there a Lord to serve? Or is it but a spectre, this form which I seem to see above me? Is it my own shadow projected on the mists which envelop me? Is what I call God the magnified image of myself? There are myriads who began life with simple, hearty, wholesome belief in the spiritual, with a knowledge of the God of their fathers which was

kindled in their young hearts from the home altar-fire, who are asking this question in a moral and mental agony—an agony which is drying up the springs of energy within them, and is blasting all the promise of their lives. I may be inclined to take too sad a view—some will think that I do. Perhaps if people at large saw and heard all that ministers see and hear, they might even be somewhat sadder; but it does appear to me that these are times when it is peculiarly hard for intelligent, cultivated young lads and girls to hold fast a simple, fruitful faith in God. We talk of houses with their fronts off. Were the secrets of your hearts laid bare, you who are numbered among the faithful, and have for years been esteemed pillars it may be, how much dark doubt or blank unbelief would be revealed? While, on the other hand, how much beautiful simple, child-like faith might be found, fruitful in good works, that few eyes but the angels' look upon, in what would be thought by spiritual critics somewhat worldly hearts.

But I feel deep anxiety for, and sympathy with, the young in their struggle. We live in times when there is no upper and lower intellectual region, with slight and rare communication. The finest thoughts of the finest minds about the pro-

foundest themes are made at once, by our literary energy and activity, the common property of mankind. An age, even a generation, ago, the sceptics and the theologians had their battle almost to themselves in the higher intellectual regions, to which few but those who had special business there, and were especially able to take care of themselves, cared to penetrate, and the harm they did was chiefly to each other. Now by lectures, periodicals, and cheap publications, the blankest denial of God, of responsibility, of immortality, of morality, argued out with consummate skill, is placed within reach of every child. The vigilant preventive service which of old kept such matters out of the hands and the heads of young people, is now absolutely impossible; and I hold it to be a very terrible temptation to the young to find so many of the ablest thinkers and the most vigorous and charming writers of the day, quietly ignoring the whole world of which the Bible is the revelation, and piercing the beliefs which are most dear to us, which make religion possible, with the shafts of a keen and polished scorn.

Young souls cannot see as clearly as their elders whence this springs, and whither it tends; how it has been suffered to befall the religious

world as a chastisement for its worldliness, its narrowness, its bigotry, its profounder infidelity. Nor can they measure all that it is costing. They cannot catch the undertone of wailing which runs through this whole school of thought and finds dread utterance in its works of imagination; nor can they forecast the future which it is making for us; nor imagine the valley of desolation into which, if no quickening comes from on high, it will lead forth the world. They are easily caught by the glamour of brilliant argument and declamation; and in the whirl of ceaseless discovery, the glare of new lights which are constantly falling on all things, they may easily dream that the very foundations on which all things stand are shifting like the rest. And then a great terror falls on them and on all who love them. They seem to be drifting on a dark ocean, wherever the unknown currents may float them. All that used to be a guide to them has vanished. All the beliefs and aspirations which linked them to the spiritual world and drew down its life into their spirits, "the fiery darts of the devil" have destroyed. They may watch the drift with keen anguish, or worse, with dull indifference; but for the present all their light has vanished, all their hope is dead.

Against such influences the one safeguard is "the shield of faith." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"—the oldest Gospel is the newest—"and thou shalt be saved." Lay hold on the reality of His life, His death, His resurrection and ascension, and let nothing tear you from it. "You know nothing about God, and can know nothing," say the philosophers. I answer, I know this about God, and nothing shall rob me of the knowledge; the shield of faith shall guard it as I guard dear life: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," that I "through Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Mystery there is and must be,—philosophy cannot dispel it; but one thing shines out of the heart of the mystery, self-luminous, it warms and gladdens me like the sunlight, "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief;" so that through all the doubts, difficulties, and dangers to faith which are abroad, I may be able to affirm with a voice which never falters for a moment, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day."

2. There are other perilous influences abroad in our times which the shield of faith alone can

master, on which I have hardly left myself space to dwell. We have day by day a clearer vision of the constant and all-comprehensive reign of law. The habit of regarding enormous masses and forces as under the calm rule of the laws of the Creation, dwarfs humanity. In the presence of the vast ranks of beings and of movements, all falling into the rhythmic motion which poets call the music of the spheres, our little lives seem but as motes dancing in the sunbeam; moved by the same forces, swept on the same currents, having the same entrances and destined to the same exits as the rest. It is hard to hold fast the sense of an individual, a self-determining will, which is God's likeness in the human, and makes man's life and destiny the great miracle of the Creation; "of God," "by God," "to God," in a sense which is unshared even by the elect angels who bow before the eternal throne. Amid all the bewildering revelations of the Creation, and the dark doubts about the nature and play of our moral freedom which are abroad in the intellectual sphere, I know not what is to uphold us in our consciousness of a will, and our belief in moral responsibility and immortality, but faith in Christ. If His life be not a dream or a fiction, the word "Son of God" has an everlasting mean-

ing for us; and judgment and immortality are the dread realities of our pilgrimage. Following Jesus in the way, the sense grows on us that *this* world which so perplexes and bewilders us is the shadow, and that "the kingdom of God and His righteousness" are the solid realities of life which endure. If we can see the living form, and hear the living voice, and feel the living touch of the Man of sorrows, the Man of glory, our doubt is dissipated. Sophisms grow vaporous and vanish before the living light which that history flashes on us. "We believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" is our confession; and our feet touch the rock, the Rock of Ages. Here I stand, here I rest.

3. There is yet another point which claims notice before I pass from the subject. The grave perplexity of the problems of society, the manifold manifestations of evil, and the profound difficulty of grappling with them with any fair measure of success, paralyse many a noble endeavour in these days, and make many a life which seemed charged with genial ministry a wreck. Deep, deadly weariness in well-doing is constantly stealing over the spirit. The work is overwhelming in magnitude, and the most strenuous labour, as far as fruit is concerned, like

bread cast upon the waters, vanishes from sight. The needy constantly repay the ministry with ingratitude, perhaps with objurgations. Heaven lets men suffer, and why should we care? is the question which is often rising to our faithless lips. "The poor!" says one of the teachers of our times, "they are not my poor." And in some shape or other the same denial is always palsying the hands which are outstretched to help and to save.

No, they are not our poor, but Christ's, is the thought which the shield of faith lifts against the paralysing suggestion. The Lord left them to us as a charge, a burden, which for His dear sake we are to bravely bear. He made them ours, by telling us how hardly their sad lot presses on His tender, compassionate heart. The ministry of His disciples is the help which He sends to the world in its need; His benediction, which is to souls as sunlight to flowers, is the recompense of the gift, the toil, the service which in His name, and by the constraints of His mercy, we render. "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not," we hear Him crying, as we bend under the burden, and are ready to abandon the ministry in despair. Faith stirs us to new and more strenuous effort;

the strength of Christ flows down and reanimates our failing powers. We rally our courage, we brace our armour, we lift our shield and renew the battle, minded to press on, "faint, yet pursuing," until our Master sees that our work is done. Nor can we dream that the strain will be relaxed, even for a moment, until we can cry, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith;" as the sword drops from our stiffening hand in death.

VI.

THE HELMET OF SALVATION.

“And take the helmet of salvation.”—Eph. vi. 17.

“**A**ND for an helmet, the hope of ‘salvation,’ the Apostle writes elsewhere, setting forth his thought more at large. The helmet is without question the expressive portion of the armour. It not only guards the head, it crowns it. It carries its expression of courage, of hardihood, of defiance, or of the sure hope of victory. The gallant bearing of the soldier gives character to the carriage of the helmet; flashing in its sheen, nodding in its plumes, tossing in its crest. The “port” of a soldier is mainly the way in which head and helmet are borne. The helmet too, is selected to bear the crest, which is the chosen emblem of the man. All martial peoples have lavished their art on this piece of the armour. There is nothing that we should miss more in the aspect of our army than the bearskins of the Guards. The use of crests probably arose from the efforts of daring, ruthless warriors to strike

terror into their foes, by bearing savage and ferocious images on their headpieces as emblems of the strength and fury within.

Well, Christianity went forth into the world helmeted with hope. The expression of the whole Christian Church in the first generation was charged with a radiant, exulting, unconquerable hope. The truth which they preached was God's own truth; the righteousness which they wore as a breastplate was God's own righteousness; their love, tender and cherishing, even to the world's publicans and sinners, was kindled from Christ's own heart. These all were mighty powers of influence and instruments of conquest. But that which chiefly cleared their path before them, and bore them on triumphant in their career of blessing, which drove the devil's rout in front of them, and rallied all loyal hearts to their cause, was the helmet of hope which they wore. This, the hope of salvation, was the sure precursor of victory, and bore them on far into the ranks of the enemies of truth, righteousness, and God. They were the only men in this dark, sad world who had a great hope in their hearts, these Apostles and apostolic Christians. Wherever they moved that hope kindled, and relit the dying fires on the sacred altar of the world. Let us consider,—

I. The association of the helmet with the ideas of hope and joy.

The head is that portion of the frame which carries the expression of the manly vigour, courage, and endurance, which fit a man to play his part nobly in the workshop and the battle-field of life. The head holds the brain, and is charged with the revelation of all that enters into man's constitution, as a being whose rank is with the angels, and not with the brutes. The free, erect, well-poised carriage of the head is perhaps the supreme act of expression in the bodily form; while out of the head go forth the glances and movements which unveil the spirit, and present the man. Nothing so reveals the mood of the man at the moment as the way in which the head is carried; nothing on the whole so wins for a man favour or disfavour with his fellows as the character of the expression of this royal organ of the frame. What is a hang-dog look, but that slouching, downcast, sneaking carriage of the head, which you see in a whipt hound as it crawls away?

Mr. Darwin, in his recent book on the expression of emotion in animals, is strong on antithesis. In fact, he seems to ride the idea to death. It is impossible to believe that some of the most

remarkably expressive gestures and movements of the animal frame had their origin simply in antithesis, through the relaxation of previous states of emotion. They *must* have had, a large measure of them, an independent origin. The hangdog look which I have glanced at is no doubt wonderfully antithetical to the erect, bold, gallant bearing of the head in a man whose higher nature is all alive, not afraid to look the world in the face, or to look up to God. But it is hard to resist the impression that the ultimate reason of this expression is the affinity of all that creeps and crawls with the dust, which is the shrine of corruption, and the affinity of all that aims, hopes, and aspires with the air and the sky, which is the home of life—the broad spaces where freedom can range unfettered, and where man can find room for the unfolding and the play of all his noblest and most gallant powers.

Yes, it may be answered, but we find these expressions in lower forms in the animal creation, where there can be no such association either with the dust or the sky. Precisely so. All things on earth are made in the key, to the scale, of the human. You may read the sequence backwards or forwards. There is either a pro-

plastic striving towards the human through the whole sequence of the orders of the Creation ; or there is a constant development from order to order, until the series, without break or flaw, is crowned in man. As Christian thinkers who believe in Christ and the Resurrection, we hold strenuously to the first idea as the true key to the order of the Creation ; and we see a gradual approach to erectness, and the human carriage of the head, through all the orders of the lower Creation, because man was meant, from the moment when the first vital movement took place in the universe, to look up and on, through all the boundless heavenly spaces, for the theatre of the fair unfolding of his life. The hangdog look expresses a definite form of the carriage of the head ; you cannot imagine it helmeted. A tin kettle at the tail, not a crested helmet on the head, is the appendage which we popularly associate with that form of life. The man, in his manly vigour, courage, and enterprise, carries his head upright ; and whenever there is a special strain on his powers, special danger to be met, special defiance to be hurled, special contempt of threats and obstacles to be expressed, the head is tossed higher, and thrown backward more resolutely. The tossing of the head in

front of an enemy is tantamount to a challenge; and as long as the head is held up, the man is able to hold his own.

Just that onward pressure, onset, impetus of the man which the whole passage is intended to stimulate, finds its chief expression in the way in which he bears his head. If there is fire and force in that, the whole strength of the sword-arm will go with it, the whole man will be borne on in the sure path to victory. The helmet is the armour which a man adds to this, to increase and intensify its expression. As a guard to the crown and glory of the frame, no doubt; but not this only. Some other virtue of the helmet is, I think, associated with the hope of salvation. This is the portion of the armour which is specially adorned with crest and plumes, to magnify the aspect and martial bearing of the combatant; and it is this association which it seems to me was specially before the mind of the Apostle when he connected it with salvation—the joy of salvation and the hope.

It is hope which imparts to the moral man that upright, gallant, resistless bearing, whose expression in the physical frame we have already traced. Give a man hope spiritually, and verily you “lift up his head.” The whole moral and

mental frame recovers its tension. What do we mean by depression? It is the condition of the spirit when hope is low in the springs, and it is just the antithesis to that lifting up of the head which I have described as the effect of hope. The hopeless are depressed. The head hangs low, the eyes are bent on the ground, the whole line of the figure means sinking and crouching; it is the man cleaving to the dust, because he has no hope of winning for himself a loftier destiny. Put hope into him, the dust is spurned; the eye seeks the light, the heaven; the face is upturned to the face of God; the carriage and gesture become radiant, exulting, which, again, means leaping up. Like a man with plumed and crested helmet, which flashes in the sun and streams on the breeze as it bears itself into the heart of the enemy's war, the Christian who has "a good hope through grace" bears himself in the battle of life. Wherever he moves he carries inspiration; his presence, his look, his movement, put fresh heart, fresh life, into all whom he can bring under his magnetic spells.

The world's sadness is its hopelessness. The man who brings hope to it scatters the sadness, and opens a pure, sparkling fountain of joy. It drinks of the brook by the way, the waters

of these fountains of salvation, and with joy lifts up the head. The Apostle was a man of this kindling, inspiring presence. Like a born commander, his very presence paraded men in their best array, and stirred a vivid ardour for the impending battle. And hope was his inspiration. By hope he was saved, by hope he was seeking to save the world. He had before his mind's eye the helmed and crested warrior, all his power in hand, all his ardour in his glance, all his resolution in his bearing, all his daring and all his certainty of victory in his tossing headpiece and dancing plumes, when he wrote, And take "as an helmet the hope of salvation."

II. In order fully to appreciate the bearing of this image, we must consider how much hope meant to the world of the Apostle's days.

Men lived in a world of high culture, of high social development, as compared with anything of which they had had experience in previous ages; but it was a world which was growing more hopeless, more depressed, more down-looking and down-tending year by year. It was a world of wonderful political order and prosperity. There had been nothing in human history comparable with the order which reigned under the strong hand of the rulers of Rome. To us it

seems very sad, very terrible—the oppression, the extortion, the cruelty, the indifference to human life and to human pain, of which the Roman Empire during that first century was the theatre. We may judge something of what the world had been suffering for ages when we remind ourselves that that order, dark and sad as it seems to us, came to the war-worn, woe-worn world as a political salvation. But the inner life of men was sadder. For that, Rome had no salvation, and no promise of salvation. Gallio caring for none of these things, or Pilate's cry, "What is truth?" present the attitude of the Roman world, before those deeper questions which man must solve, or perish.

"Gallio cared for none of these things." Well, quite right, say some of our modern sages. These things are very distracting things; it is by no means necessary to care for them, and the man who can cast off all care about them, on the whole, stands the best chance of an easy and happy life. One would have liked to ask Gallio about this easy and happy life. He was a man of beautiful and brilliant qualities, if his brother's account of him is to be trusted. But his celebrated brother Seneca found life so little easy and happy, that he speaks with a dark, sad joy, if

there can be such a thing, of his power at any moment to end it by suicide, which he was glad to attempt at last. And it is said that the man who "cared for none of these things" ended his life by a suicide's death.

No; it was not an easy and happy life: it was a hopeless one. An utter darkness had settled on the minds of men about the realities of the spiritual world; and where there is darkness there is dread, and where there is dread there is misery. And even the language of the few lofty thinkers who did occupy themselves about truth, noble and elevated as is its pitch, is full of profound sadness when they consider the actual aspect and tendencies of their times. There was nothing for man to live for, nothing to draw him out of himself, nothing to lift him above himself, in the popular beliefs of the day; and so the world was in collapse, dull, cold, clammy, shivering, shuddering. A body in collapse presents a fair image of the moral condition of men under the Empire, before the light and the life which the Christians bore with them, had begun to kindle under those cold ribs of death.

It is always thus in an age or among a people in whom belief in the spiritual has become a

mere tradition or a jest. "Man shall not live by bread alone; but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall man live." Rob a man, or an age, of that bread, and he will soon begin to suffer the pangs of the inward hunger, and sink down at last, starved and shrivelled, in prostrate despair. It seems to me that this is the end to which in these days our philosophers are doing their best to bring us. The few intellectual men, or those morally of exceptional vitality and power, may sustain themselves in the higher regions for awhile when cut off from the invisible springs; but for the great multitude, loss of belief in the spiritual world means loss of belief in anything worth struggling, worth living for; it means depression, demoralization, and utter hopeless decay.

I believe that unless a reaction arises, of which we seem to see some omens, it will not be long before we have discussions in our leading periodicals, as they discussed it in Imperial Rome, whether suicide is not a fair refuge for man from otherwise intolerable ills. Give him the knowledge that he is Christ's soldier, at his post, on guard, and he understands that suicide is treason. But rob him of that, and "without God, without hope in the world," describes not

his life, but his living death. I am not entering into any elaborate disquisition on the condition of the heathen world spiritually, when those preachers went forth to it. I only want you to remember how utterly hope had died out of it, if you would understand the full force of the Apostle's image, "For an helmet the hope of salvation."

III. It was as preachers of salvation that the first Christians went forth into the world.

That lent to their aspect and movement a *verve*, a fire, a force, an impact, which perhaps no leaders of revivals and reformations have in full measure shared. They looked like men who meant to conquer; and that always half wins the battle. Nay, I am not sure that they did not become the spoilt children of victory. Their rapid and brilliant success began perhaps that corruption of the Church, which is far, very far from healed in Protestant England at this day. They were men who had received and who proclaimed the Gospel of Salvation. Saving means lifting up the head. The first and broadest feature of their proclamation was that the Maker and Ruler of the world, of all worlds, cares profoundly for the sin, the misery, and the despair of mankind. A man is beginning to be saved

who receives that thought joyfully into his heart. These men knew, and made men know, what the veil of the invisible concealed—the living God, intensely concerned, with an intensity of pity, of yearning, cherishing, redeeming love of which Calvary was the measure, for the welfare, the healing, the blessing, the saving of every soul to whom the Gospel came. God caring for man, the God of whom the Man Christ Jesus, with His words and works of boundless tenderness and compassion, was the Incarnation, caring for man—for the poor, the enslaved, the diseased, the oppressed, the wretched, the rebellious, the desperate; and sending messengers to seek them and to bear to them glad tidings of His love, and of the home which He had prepared for them with Himself.

It was like the bursting of the day in the tropics. One moment all darkness and dreariness, the next the sun is up, and glorious light irradiates the world. We can hardly imagine the kind of exultation with which the hope that the Christian preachers kindled, filled the hearts of all to whom their message came. It is a grand mistake to suppose that the hope here spoken of was simply the hope of happiness in a Paradise of delights. The uppermost thing in the hearts of

all the saints of the earliest Christian ages was a passion of love, not a calculation of recompense or even vision of delight. Islam had its sensual paradise. It kindled no love to a loving Saviour. The Gospel filled men's hearts with a passion of devotion, and the mere question of "What shall we have therefore?" was, not expunged, but kept in its proper place. The hope of the first Christian age was not a hope of happiness; the salvation was not deliverance from wrath mainly, and the hope of the inheritance of bliss. Salvation meant health, soundness, renewal of life in the spring; the sense that there was a great future before the being, for the sake of which it was worth while to toil, strive, and suffer; that the pain and anguish of the present are not unto death, but unto life; that the real day of man's spirit is eternity, and its home-land heaven.

All that comes to life through letting in upon it the light of the eternal, lifting the veil of sense and time, giving the powers of the world to come free course through all the activities of the being, and making men understand the meaning of the words, "Now is your citizenship in heaven," is the salvation which the Apostles preached, the hope of which lent an irresistible momentum to their impact on the world of their day. The

thing which was killing humanity, draining all its heart and energy away, was the thought, "There is nothing worth living for; we *are* shadows, and we pursue shadows; we eat, drink, and die; and there is the end. The Apostles said, That is not the end. There is no end. The destinies of an immortal existence are hanging on the moral decisions of the moment; there is everything to live for—God, heaven, everlasting glory and bliss. And men started from their lethargy when they heard it. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life," rang like the trumpet of God in their ears, and they that were in the tombs came forth. There was a grand uprising of humanity into the world of Jesus and the resurrection. Men thronged into the kingdom of heaven, and the joyous shout was heard among the angels, "This thy son was dead, but he is alive again; he was lost, but he is found."

IV. This salvation is a helmet; it guards and uplifts the head; it is the absolute assurance against all vital harms.

The first Christians were fearless with a fearlessness that filled the world with amazement and dread. They exulted in suffering the sharpest pangs; the extremest torments brought,

not a wail, but a shout of triumph to their lips. Women, young girls, little children, faced horrible outrages with unfaltering constancy, because they knew, not that they were safe, but that they were saved. They knew that they were Christ's, that their destiny, their home, was with Him and all the blessed in His glorious heaven. Nothing vital could perish; pincers might tear the flesh, which else the worm would soon have wasted; but the hold of the heart-strings on Christ, the cords of fellowship with the blessed, neither earth nor hell could weaken, far less destroy. Nay, the strain of the world but tightened the tension of these spiritual cords. "At my first answer no man stood with me; but all men forsook me. Nevertheless the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom."

Take that sense of salvation with you as your helmet, to guard and uplift your head. A man with a well-tried, well-braced helmet on, trusts himself freely in the midst of the battle. Sword-strokes may rain upon him, he cares not—his head is safe; all his faculties, eye, ear, mouth, work freely within that trusty shield. And you,

if you are a saved man, "if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious;" if you have said, "Lord, here am I, what wilt thou have me to do?" if you have even sighed, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief,"—bear with you a charmed life into the battle. Who is he that can harm you? What is that that can trouble you? Your being, once so worthless, so hopeless, is under the sure charge and culture of your Saviour; He who holds the world in the hollow of His hand, rules all its forces and compels all its passions to serve His will. With that, all things shall work well for you. Nothing can be adverse, no experience can be wretched, no temptation even can be deadly; you bear a life within you that must grow strong and rich by all that it suffers, and that *must*, unless you count yourself unworthy of everlasting life, and fling down your crown in the dust, win an eternal and glorious victory. Take this as a helmet through the battle: "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until that day," and bear yourself bravely joyously in the Christian war.

Let men see the hope, the joyous hope that fills you, in the carriage of your head, in the gesture of your crest. Let them see your head uplifted

to face all the oppositions and calamities that may assail you. Let them see that none of these things can move you, that none of them touch your life. Tell them what salvation means by your aspect, by the look, the tone, the tread, as you press on. Take hope to them, the hope of salvation, a salvation which gladdens, purifies, elevates, exhilarates the life ; and they will hear you gladly as they heard the Master, and they will follow the crest that they see pressing on into the heart of the realm of ignorance, misery, and death. We must rekindle our hope if we want to stir mankind as those preachers stirred them, and to cast the rulers of this darkness, where they cast them, to the dust. It is the hope of the Christian, of the Church, which is now assailed most keenly by the culture of the times. We must save it and save society, by renewing it at the spring, The good hope through grace ; hold it fast, so fast, that neither man nor devil can weaken it ; the hope that is rooted in the Incarnation—in the life, the death, the resurrection, the reign of the Lord Jesus. It is a hope that maketh not ashamed, a hope that purifies and saves ; the hope that when the battle is ended, the training is over, the race is run, there is a world where those who have suffered with Christ shall reign

with Him, where "His dead men" shall live—a world where all truth shall be established, all righteousness shall be vindicated, all life shall be glorified, in the great day of restitution of all things, the day of the manifestation of the sons of God.

VII.

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT.

“And take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”—Eph. vi. 17.

THE Apostles took that sword, and with it they cleared their way into the very heart of the realm of “the rulers of the darkness of this world.” In Rome, in the imperial palace, there was a company of disciples of Jesus, subjects and soldiers of His kingdom, prompt to preach, and armed to suffer for, the Gospel, long before the chiefest of the Apostles, having fought his good fight and finished his course with joy, went home to God. Nothing that man can handle smites with an edge so keen, with a sweep so trenchant, as God’s word on the lips of a man whose heart it has fired. Let a man take that sword, his heart aglow with the ardour of faith and love, and he is simply invincible. The mere imagination of a Divine word, such as that of the first preachers of Islam—a real imagination, that is, an imagination which man has caught from the vision of the substance, of the thing that is

though he is content with the image which he can fashion of it for himself—has proved a tremendous conquering force more than once in history.

Nothing can withstand the word of the false prophet, if he is in earnest, but the word of the true. It was the real hold which Christendom had of the solid fact of the Incarnation, which stayed at last the progress of Mahometan conquest, and turned the tide which in earlier ages a faithless, Christless Church had suffered to swell, till it threatened to sweep Christendom away. The sword of the Spirit, the word of God, is winning still that tremendous battle against the most formidable antagonist who has ever entered the lists against the truth of the Gospel. It is the measure in which the word of God has entered into, has moulded and leavened, all the institutions of Christendom, which lends to the Christian nations that weight and force which is gradually bearing back and bearing down, not Islam only, but all vain thoughts and proud imaginations of the heathen schools which exalt themselves against Christ, and is winning for Christian civilisation the easy mastery of the world. And did Christendom believe in the power and sharpness of her sword of truth, did

she wield it in these days with the force and the fire which animated the first soldiers of the Cross, did she hold up the Cross still as Paul held it, not as an idolatrous image, or a symbol of theological narrowness and pride, but as the power of God to salvation—to healing, health, courage, joy, and hope—still as of old the world would go down before her onset, and the first notes of the Hallelujah would already be heard beating on the throbbing air, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. Hallelujah! the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

I. The sword of the Spirit.

The Apostles were distinctly and avowedly the spokesmen of the Holy Ghost. They spake as “the Spirit gave them utterance.” The Spirit is the Divine Person by whom the perpetual presence of the Lord Christ is realized, and His work carried onward in the world, “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” “Nevertheless I tell you

the truth ; It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." (John xiv. 15—17 ; xvi. 7). The Spirit is the ever-present Saviour. There is much talk now of the Real Presence, talk with the inner meaning of which, as it expresses a great human need, I have profound sympathy ; while with the outer form of it, the way in which it proposes to supply that need, I have absolutely none. But the sense of the Real Presence, the perpetual presence of the Lord with the world which He has redeemed, is the profoundest need of the human spirit. The Mass seeks to prolong the passion of the Saviour ; with a dull idea that the act of Redemption ought to be a present act, the act of to-day, not an act recorded in history nearly two thousand years ago. Here, again, there is expressed a real craving of man's heart and spirit which the Gospel recognizes and satisfies—to the spirit. The Romanists demand that it shall be satisfied to the senses ; transubstantiation makes the Eucharist a constant breaking of the body and shedding of the blood of the Lord.

The Holy Ghost the Comforter, dwelling with, dwelling in, the Church ; suffering, striving,

struggling with the dead weight of its indifference or the deadly opposition of its sin, grieved, wounded, but long-suffering still, satisfies this need to the spirit. Spiritually His ministry prolongs the Passion, and makes the travail of the Redeemer's soul an ever-present, an ever-living power of Redemption to a man and to mankind. Of this Holy Ghost the Comforter, the Apostles were the spokesmen and organs. They spoke the word which He put into their hearts, they radiated the light and the life which He had kindled and quickened within.

Pentecost made them new men, in all that concerned their Apostolic function. I marvel that any can study the words and the works of these men before and after that fiery baptism, and can refuse to see that somehow, at that crisis, a vital transformation had been effected within them; somehow they had become endowed with a wisdom on which the world's most cultivated peoples have for eighteen centuries been living, and with a force which generated that movement in society, which has simply gathered momentum from the days of the Apostles until now. They had but one account of it: "They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." I have read many accounts of it, many attempts to trace that vital

movement to its springs. I come back to this as alone credible—as alone able to explain the transcendent phenomena of which Christendom is the fruit. And the word is that Spirit's sword. He seized the Apostles, possessed them, inspired them—to do what? To speak words—words whereby they and their fellow-men were to be saved. Words were their power. "The Jews require a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

And their speech and their preaching "was not with enticing words of man's wisdom," "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Their word proved itself literally a mightier thing upon earth than the Roman sword. They founded an empire which shattered the Roman dominion to fragments, and reorganized on an entirely new basis the form of human society. It was Christianity, and not the barbarians, which really broke up the Empire. The Empire began to die from the hour that the apostolic preachers proclaimed the Kingdom of God and His righteousness to the world. The mightiest thing which

has ever wrought in our world—wrought practically, I mean, on the relations of men, on the forms and institutions of society, on the progress of mankind, in art, industry, law, and political organization—was this word of the Apostolic preachers. The word which that Spirit put into their hearts, and which flashed like fire from their lips, was mighty through God to the pulling down the strongholds of sin; it drove a shaft of light, it poured a flood, into the heart of the devil's domain of darkness. Read their history, and the history of the world as it was transformed and saved by their Gospel, if you would comprehend the sweep and the keenness of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

II. The relation of the Spirit to the Word, it is worth our while for a moment to explore.

The charge of Stephen against the Jews is explicitly, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." It is said elsewhere, "The Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." The two statements can only be reconciled by considering that the measure of the Spirit's influence is practically the measure of the truth which He can present to, and urge on, the soul. "He takes of the things of God," and "shows them" to man. All of God which could be shown

under the Old Testament was that which was revealed under the Old Testament; and Judaism, in its highest aspects and aspirations, as you may gather them from Isaiah's prophecies, was the result.

The Incarnation, the passion, death, and resurrection of the Divine Man, gave the Spirit a new and altogether grander instrument to work with. He had things to show which in their nature were calculated and were meant to stir man's being to its very depths, to fire its passion, to quicken its hope, to awaken and constrain its love. These "things of Christ" the Spirit took and showed to men; and Christendom, with its free, large, expansive, victorious spirit, is the result. Is then, I may be asked, the work of the Spirit simply the work of the truth? Present the truth to the mind, and certain results will flow from it—is this the Spirit's work? This is precisely what I do not mean. The bare, bald, clear statement of a fact is one thing—it has its virtue, it has its power. But you all know in human affairs how a bare fact is transformed, transfigured rather, when a living person, with profound belief in it, and as profound interest in its acceptance, undertakes to urge it, becomes its advocate with a cold and unwilling

heart. The fire of zeal, of enthusiasm, of love, melts the icy barrier. The soul, inflamed with zeal, carries by storm the fortress which it assails, and wins for the truth a lodgment in the spirit, which in its bare, cold, naked power it never could have conquered.

It is the truth with the fire of life added, infused, that conquers. And if the doctrine of "the Holy Ghost, the Comforter," means anything, it means that there is a Divine Person who takes the truth, and with all the zeal, the force, the winning tenderness of Divine love, urges, presses it on the soul. It means that God in person is earnestly, intensely at work around, within us—presenting the truth, urging the truth, pleading, striving for the truth; and that if the heart is still barred, it is barred not against the truth only, but against the sympathy, the tenderness, the persuasive power of the living and ever-present God. And as the Spirit takes of the things of Christ and presses them on man's spirit, so the men who are born of the Spirit, who have caught the breath of His inspiration, His zeal for truth, His tender, yearning compassion for the souls of men, become His advocates, His ambassadors; and thus they open their commission: "Now then we are ambassadors for

Christ, as though God did beseech you by us ; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

III. When St. Paul wrote, it was not the first time that the sword of the Spirit had been made bare. There had been for many centuries a people settled on the borderland of the Eastern and Western worlds, whose institutions, whose beliefs, whose literature, had an altogether peculiar power, and were endowed not only with a marvellous vital tenacity, but with singular incisive force. There was something about that people which made them the world's Evangelists. Their ideas have broken out from their little mountain home, and have spread through the civilised world.

Even in those earlier ages, when they were well-nigh lost to sight under the shadow of the two great empires between which they lived, they had proved their power to wield a lordly influence over men. A Jew in Egypt, at a great crisis of Egyptian history, had become the supreme influence in the empire ; at a yet greater crisis in Chaldean history, a Jew had compelled the foremost man of all the world, a great imperial spirit, to own for himself and for his empire the truth of the Jewish belief about

God and the unseen world. Nearer to the Apostles' times, the Jews had broken out from their own land and scattered themselves over the empire. Everywhere they made converts. Amid universal decay of faith, they knew whom they believed, and proclaimed Him. Amid the universal decay of morality, they had a law, clear, firm, changeless as the course of the stars. And they had a family life, and a patriotic passion, which made them a marked people and a moral power, wherever the lot of a little knot of them might be cast.

The Romans hated them, for they stood a little in awe of them; of all the peoples in the wide world, the Jews were the only people whom the Romans honoured with their hate. There was that in them which defied destruction. Alone among the gods of the nations, their God refused to be enshrined in honourable seclusion in the Pantheon at Rome. All the gods of the nations, all the philosophies of the nations, all the religions of the nations, all the nationalities of the nations, were lost, dissolved in the crucible of Roman dominion; but the God of the Jews, the faith of the Jews, the religious literature of the Jews, the nationality of the Jews, were untouched by the fire. They came out of the

crucible, like those young men out of the furnace, with no smell even of the fire upon them ; and they won for their Scriptures, their Patriarchs, their Psalmists, their Prophets, their Messiah, the child of their nation, the supreme honour, the supreme homage, the supreme worship, of the world.

If any ask the secret of their intense vitality as a nation, their unity, their capacity, their influence on other nations, he must seek it in God's revealed word, in the holy oracles which were entrusted to their charge. If any seek further to understand the secret of that victorious force with which they bore their Scriptures, their beliefs, their Messiah, through the earth, there is but one answer—"They took the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

IV. The Apostles took the old Jewish beliefs, as they were expounded and expanded by the Son of David, the child and heir of the whole dispensation, and made them mighty and effectual weapons against all that was wasting and destroying human society.

The one secret of all the power which the Jews had wielded was the secret of the conquering power of the Apostles—"They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (1 Peter 10—12; 2 Peter i. 21).

It was just the word from God's own lips that they took, and with it they overthrew, wherever they moved and gathered men around them, tyranny, avarice, gluttony, drunkenness, lust, envy, hate, strife, slavery, and war. "God is against all these; we have heard it from His own lips, we have seen it in His own life. Brother men, sons of God, awake, arise, and cast them out of your homes and your hearts." Men knew then that God had spoken, that the whole weight and force of Heaven was against the dark rout of lusts and lies that was devastating the world; and they rose up against them with a vehemence, a destructive fury, which nothing but the thought "God is with us, and against the things which we hate," can inspire.

The Spirit took the truth of the brotherhood of man in Christ, and put a brand on slavery, which from that hour marked it for destruction. From the day that Paul sent back Onesimus to Philemon, and commended the runaway slave to his master as a "brother beloved," slavery began visibly to die. The Church, through all the Christian ages, has been struggling against it by word and by work, has banished it from Europe, is banishing it from America, and will soon have banished its accursed presence from the earth.

You may talk of the spread of intelligence, of civilisation, of the growing perception of the unprofitableness of slavery, and the like, as accounting for its extinction; there was no sense of anything about it but that God hated it, and, that God's word condemned it, when it received its first deadly wound. It was enough. The men who were making the future, the men of faith, the men who had the ear of the world's conscience and heart, doomed it; in that strength, by that right—God's word is against it—they wrote its sentence; this generation will see its death-struggle, and bury its hateful form for ever from the sight of men.

God's word was against luxury, gluttony, and lust. Men took that word as a sword, and wrought the moral reformation which saved society from wreck. God's word made home-life sacred and beautiful. Men took that word as a sword, and slew the vices which were eating into the heart of all that had once been noble and pure in the home-life of the Roman world. That word taught men continence, chastity, gentleness, self-denial, and reverence for innocence, purity, and charity. It made woman man's equal and help-meet; children, man's most sacred trust from the Father of spirits; servants, brethren in

the common servitude of the blessed Saviour and Master of all men ; and slaves, fellow-freemen of the Kingdom of God. From that day began that redemption of the family life which lies at the root of man's social salvation. The word of God in which St. Paul declares Christ's mind about the whole life of the home, has a power whose springs are still unfathomed ; a keen edge that has yet to execute judgment on the vices and vanities which are still wasting the homes of our earth.

The rights of peoples, the just claims of the poor, are spoken of nowadays as though the French Revolution had first promulgated that Gospel. It was but the voice of the oldest Gospel—older even than the day when "the poor had the Gospel preached unto them," old as Isaiah, old as David, old as Moses—which then shook the world. It was just the measure of the truth of the Gospel which was in it, which made that tremendous uprising of humanity a power to inaugurate a new era in the progress of mankind.

We have many keen sword blades at work now completing the overthrow of all "that loveth and maketh a lie," all that ravages, wastes, destroys, in the homes and the States of Christendom. The men who struck the first

deadly blow at the devil's dominion, who made the first effectual inroad on the realm of darkness and death, who first struck down the lies, the lusts, the wrongs, which were fast making the world a hell, and established a kingdom of Heaven, or rather proclaimed that God had established it, amid the chaos of discord and hate; the men who in all ages have fought in the van of this battle, the men who in these days are the leaders, the captains in this great army of the Lord; the men who are bearing the standard far on into the heart of the hostile array, and who will win the final and everlasting victory; the men whom Christ will own and crown as His conquering soldiers in the day of the restoration of all things, when the Lamb shall be throned and crowned for ever, are the men who wield "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

V. It is to that sword that we are to look to win the battle which is being fought out through all the ages of man's history, to make this world the kingdom of Heaven.

One hears enough of new social movements in these days; new combinations of social elements, new ideas of social organization, new types of social life. The more I hear, read, and see about

it all, the more profoundly does the conclusion settle itself in my mind that what we want is *restoration, reformation* on the oldest basis, the *rekindling* of the oldest life. We talk popularly of Reformations as if they were beginnings of new orders of things, the invention of new modes and ends of life. Their whole virtue and power, that whereby in all ages they have wrought blessedly for man, and laid firm hold on his imagination and his heart, lies in the fact that they are restorations of an old order, revivals of an old life.

It is one of the proofs, surely, that man, as well as his motto, "Know thyself," descended from Heaven, that he always looks back to his past as the prophecy of his future. His proudest movements of progress are Reformations, the re-establishment of an order which was once beautiful and blessed, for it came fresh from the Divine hand. I do not enter into the question of Eden; though I do not believe that that was either substantially a fable or a dream. But within the region of historic light, within the realm of Revelation, there are pictures of political, social, and moral order, which the highest developments of the future can but fulfil.

We have to take the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, which David, Isaiah, Paul, and the Great Master, put into our hands. We have to make men understand what God is seeking for humanity, what God is hoping for humanity. We have to enlist man's zeal and devotion as His fellow-workers, His fellow-helpers in His kingdom. We have to make men believe, as firmly as Mahomet's followers dreamed, that it is God's commission which they are fulfilling, God's order which they are establishing, God's hope which they are realizing, in teaching rulers justice, magistrates integrity, traders honesty, zealots tolerances, rich men generosity, poor men patience, subjects loyalty, classes sympathy, all men truth, righteousness, and charity. We must open again this handbook of life, and read what God has for untold ages been patiently seeking for His world, and seek it with Him. Our Christian legislation is all on this basis. King Alfred opened his book of laws with the recital of the Divine statutes. One of our most able men of science once said to me that he wanted nothing but the Pentateuch to establish the most perfect sanitary order in our land. Masters and servants, capitalists and workmen, rulers and subjects, want nothing higher and deeper than

the New Testament legislation, to pass on to a permanent settlement of the questions which now torment and rend society. The one thing for which, as Christian patriots and lovers of mankind, we must strive and pray is "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Strive ! I say, as well as pray. I often think of the two old Scotchmen—"Well," says Donald, "God mend all !" "Nay, Donald, but we must help Him to mend it." Amen and Amen.

VIII.

PRAYING ALWAYS.

“Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”—*EPH. vi. 18.*

“PRAYING always,” fitly crowns the description of the soldier’s armament for the Christian War. The power of prayer is one of the mysteries of the kingdom of God; and as the science of our day is contemptuous of mysteries—though it is brought daily more and more face to face with the mystery of mysteries, how anything in this great universe ever came to be at all—it speaks slightly of prayer. It is but, we are told, a voice forced out by an unnatural strain into the infinite unknown around us, which mistakes its own echoes for the answer of God. If it helps man in his suffering and perplexity, let him pray by all means; but if he thinks that there is any ear into which his voice can enter, and any hand that can be moved by it to his help, he is cheating himself with dreams; and is wasting on an illusion the faculty

which, applied wisely and methodically, according to the teachings of science, to the visible realities around him, might have brought him real help from a real world. And what can prayer do, with an order so vast, so awful in its serene constancy, as the great world system around us? Is it not, must it not be, the maddest presumption to believe that a puny mortal, born like the beasts from the dust, and crumbling like the beasts to dust again, can shake the settled order of the Creation, and introduce the action of a variable will into such regions as are ruled by gravitation, chemical affinity, and the momentum of the stars?

Our answer to that question is simply—the Incarnation. If that be a reality, all that is meant by prayer, all that grows out of prayer, is not only possible, but lies in the higher order of that moral government of which the keystone is the Incarnation. If that be an illusion, a phantom of man's imagination, then prayer may well be illusive, all man's hopes and dreams as an immortal spirit in that case may be dismissed as part of the phantom rout, with which the arch-phantom mocks the heart of humanity, and lures it, trusting, hoping, praying, to its only home—the dust.

The question of prayer is in truth a part of a far larger question ; it hangs to this, is there or is there not a moral ruler and a moral order of the world ? Are we under the government of a Being with will and intelligence, or are we like motes swept on the currents of the forces that are whirling around us, dancing our day in the sunshine, and then bequeathing the treasure of our being, for which we have wept and striven, to man's last heir—the pit ? The whole question hangs on the reality of the moral order and government of the world. If the government of free beings be, as Redemption affirms, and, if its central facts be accepted, absolutely establishes, the highest sphere of the Creator's activity, that for which all other spheres are made and on which they wait, then there is not only room for prayer and for all the results which flow from it, but there is the imperative demand for it. It is the very highest instrument of culture which God has placed at the disposal of free spiritual beings, and it affords to Him the highest, the directest, the completest means of influence on their consciences and hearts.

The more one studies the controversies of the times in the religious sphere, the more one sees that there is but one fundamental contro-

versy, and that all the questions about miracles, about prayer, about the spiritual element in man, about immortality, are but affairs of outposts, which derive their interest and importance from the great question, on which all hangs, by the answer to which all stands or falls. Is there, or is there not, a living Being, a Being of will, intelligence, and love, the Being whom Christ reveals to us, ruling the universe to the accomplishment of purposes to which the Redemption which is by Christ Jesus is the key? To him who holds that the thoughts which man believes to be his most lofty and sacred thoughts, are not his illusions; that his most intense and far-reaching aspirations are not vain, feverish dreams; that the most solemn passages of his history are not a sacrifice offered on the altar of folly to his own shadow; that the order, the moral order and progress which his history reveals, and which these old records prophesy, is not an accident; that the life and death of the Son of Man is not the supreme sigh of life's sadness, but the spring of its hope and its higher joy; that the faith in which Christendom has toiled and struggled onwards through all these ages, and which its holiest, purest, and most constructive spirits held to their hearts as their

dearest treasure, guarding it as dearer than dear life against earth and hell, was not a figment—to those who believe this, prayer will seem, not a vain superstition, but the most sacred and sure of all realities, the living fellowship of the human spirit with the Father—God.

I say the dearest and most sacred of all realities. What is the most precious gift to man, of all the things that are around him here? Unquestionably the power of holding living intercourse with his fellows. The blind, who are deprived of the vision of the Creation, if human lips can speak to them tenderly, bear the privation with wonderful cheerfulness. The deaf, to whom the music of human speech is silent, whose living fellowship with their human brethren is crippled, bear it bitterly; they know that the best gift of this life is lost. And the thing most precious to man, of all things which the vast universe can offer to him, is the power and the means of living fellowship with the Father of his spirit. Rob him of that, make him doubt its reality, persuade him that it is the shadow of himself that he seems to see, and the echo of his own cry that he seems to hear, when in Christ he thinks that he sees and communes with the Father of his spirit, and you plunge him into a

misery which will deepen into madness, and will spend itself in orgies of brutal cruelty and lust; until, like the prodigal in the far wilderness, sick, starved, in an agony of inward pain and hunger, he cries, "*I will arise and go unto my Father,*" and sets his tottering steps towards the old and blessed home once more.

Such misery, such beggary, such a staggering, tottering homeward path, those who are scoffing at prayer and faith, are doing their best to prepare for the generation, which they dream of emancipating from the fetters of worn-out superstitions for ever.

I. "*Praying always.*" Through the whole of this course of Lectures on the Christian armour, I have kept one point steadily before my own mind, and tried to keep it before yours; let me recall it as I close. These men who literally revolutionized the world, who made an entirely new era in its history, who laid the basis on which for eighteen centuries all the strongest, bravest, most masterful, most cultivated, and most progressive peoples of the world, have been standing, working, and moving forward the development of the race, believed themselves to be the called servants and soldiers of the God of Heaven, the Creator and the Ruler of all these

worlds. They believed that He had spoken in time past to the world by prophets, but that in their days He had spoken by the Son, whose word they had to speak, whose battle they had to fight, whose work they had to do, and must do, though it cost them pain, bonds, wounds, and death.

They had no shadow of a doubt that a living Being in the unseen world, who had manifested Himself by the Incarnation in the seen world, was their Master, their Teacher, their Captain—whose Spirit was always present with them, by whom they were constantly taught, led, and inspired. They believed that profoundly; and the world went down before them. Its rulers, its judges, its captains, its kings, its merchants, its poor, its slaves, all in the course of a few generations suffered a transformation. The world became convinced of their truth; submissive in profession and purpose to the commandments, and penetrated by the ideas which they asserted that they were inspired to communicate to mankind. The recognition of the truth—the Incarnation, the baptism of Pentecost, the gift of the Spirit by the risen and ascended Saviour, the lifting of the veil which had hidden the things not seen and eternal—which their message proclaimed, started the world on a new career of

progress. It lifted civilised society bodily to a higher level, with the horizon of eternity open all round, and it placed man under a light and an inspiration which contrasts the Christian with the pre-Christian ages, as strongly as meridian day contrasts with the coldest, dimmest morning light.

And the vital force which did it was their faith in "*the Apostle and High Priest of their profession, Christ Jesus.*" They went everywhere as men who were armed and commissioned by Him, to fight against the dense rout of lusts and sins, and tyrannies and hates, which were breaking the world's heart, because they were destroying its hope. And wherever they went they had the world up in arms against them. Its rulers, its soldiers, its priests, its nobles, its mobs, were all banded to resist them. Every torment and torture which man could wreak upon them was exhausted in the effort to crush them down. But nothing could crush them. As well crush light, or water bubbling from a living spring. They came, they spake, they conquered, wherever they bore their Gospel.

But everywhere it was the doctrine of a living Saviour, a living Guide, Teacher, and Captain of men, which caught like flame from heart to

heart, and made all who caught it living conductors of the light and fire. Extract this central idea of Christianity from the history of Christendom, and you rend the whole to fragments. It is the one royal thread which holds it together, which makes it an organic whole, a thing of life.

That by which men live is that which I cling to; that which kindles in hearts and quickens in spirits, which makes life a victorious battle, which has power to beat down, and has proved its power and will prove it again to beat down, all the miserable mischiefs which are making sad, are making mad, a miserable world. That shall win my allegiance, that shall hold my trust and love, and that shall move me to pray always, with, all supplication, with all perseverance for all saints—for all Christ's soldiers in this spiritual war, for all His fellowhelpers in the kingdom, for all the workmen who are building for Him the great human temple, where redeemed man is to minister eternally—that they may open their mouths boldly, that they may speak the word freely, that they may fight the battle bravely, and win by prayer and faith the empire of the world for their beloved, adored, and glorious King.

II. Prayer under these conditions was needful as the vital air to their spirits.

You will note here that the prayer in question is for spiritual objects. For the free, bold, powerful proclamation of the Gospel; for the overthrow of the reign of evil, and for the swift accomplishment of the benign purposes of God. There is no question here of the suspension or modification of the physical laws of the universe, such as is supposed to be contemplated in prayer for rain or fair weather, on which there is so much argument in these days. Though concerning this last it may be said, that, if the physical is but the satellite, as it were, of the spiritual order of the world, if, as Redemption declares, the whole system of things is created and sustained that it may be the theatre of the unfolding to its fair, Christlike proportions of the Divine life in man, then the modulation of the physical for spiritual occasions and ends is no suspension of any law, but the working out of a larger and more far-reaching law, which can be studied only by those who search out the ways of God in the spiritual sphere.

But there is no question of that here. The prayer is for truth, power, life, and the victory of the good. These Christian champions were pressed

in spirit to prayer. All the world was against them, all heaven was for them. They needed to commune with heaven and the God of heaven ; they longed naturally, intensely, to hear the voice, to receive the communications, to feel the touch of their unseen but Almighty Friend and Leader, as the condition of their bearing up against the pressure of all the powers and influences of the world, which else must have borne them down to the dust. Acts iv. 15—31, furnishes a remarkable instance. It was their natural, their inevitable attitude and action. As naturally as their lungs drew in deep inspirations of the vital air, their souls sought to breathe the atmosphere of the near fellowship of God. Pray they must, or perish.

No man can stand firmly through life against the whole world of his time, except God be with him. Socrates, who bore witness against the world, the flesh, and the devil of his day, was conscious of a Divine voice within, which he obeyed, and with whose " Well-done " he was fearless. And men who are cast on the help of God, who have no stay or hope but God, must talk with Him, cry to Him, wrestle with Him for the power to endure and the power to overcome. Communion with a friend, a teacher, a helper, is essential ;

it is the dearest delight of the spirit, as well as its strength and stay. Forbid the Christian combatant, bent on fighting the good fight, and winning the victory over world and devil, to pray, you forbid him to hope, you forbid him to live, you bind him down in an atmosphere laden with mephitic vapours, while above, if you suffer him to pray, there are the bright, pure, inspiring currents, which sweep down from his native heaven.

But a difficulty of this sort arises. These prayers are for objects which God too has at heart. They are emphatically according to the will of God. These are the ends for which the Lord has expended the groans and the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, and the unutterable anguish of Calvary. Why need man add his puny prayers for objects which are already so near to the Divine heart? God is surely too deeply pledged to them, to suffer a prayer more or less to affect His purposes or frustrate His designs.

This difficulty simply overlooks the fundamental conditions of the matter. The ends which God has thus set before Himself, and to which He has pledged Himself by such awful expenditure of toil and pain, are ends which can only be gained through human co-operation.

God has, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, set before Himself an end in which He and man must be fellow-workers, free, loving fellow-workers, if it is ever to be gained.

The whole aim of His discipline of man's spirit is to lift him up to the enjoyment of this fellowship with the Most High. God seeks to inspire him with His own hatred of evil, His own estimation of the world, His own truth, righteousness, and charity, His own spirit of self-devotion and self-sacrifice, His own hope of the future, which shall repay all the pain and shame of life, and justify all the groaning and travail of Creation, in "*the day of the manifestation of the sons of God.*" Prayer is the utterance of man's response to this claim and hope of God. It is the communion of man with his Maker about the things which God has taught him to contemplate and to cherish. It is the voice of man, the fellow-worker, the fellow-helper, entering into the ear of Him who is listening for it on high.

There can be no high concert without communion. If the man who has been called to fight for Christ and with Christ, to suffer with Christ, to hope with Christ, to conquer with Christ, has nothing to say to Christ, no love to express, no blessing to crave, no strength to renew by

contact with the Almighty hand, then there is no sonship; then God and man are two—in two spheres for ever; then all the great ends for which Christ died on Calvary are frustrated; the hope with which God made and rules the worlds is dead.

But not only is it the expression of fellowship, of purpose and hope; it is the one means by which the friend, the fellow-worker, the fellow-soldier of Christ is furnished for his enterprise, and kept continually to the full strain of his power. Prayer is the opening of the pores of the soul to drink in the spiritual baptism which floods all the air. It is as a free being that God has chosen to constitute man, and it is as a free being that He must deal with him. Even the Lord, full charged with celestial energy, could do no mighty work in a certain place because of their unbelief. While the poor, blind beggar who could only cry, and would not cease crying, "*Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me,*" drew forth at once the power to save. Prayer purges the soul of all the earthly dross which mixes itself with the life which God kindles and feeds within. The world and the flesh are ever defiling its purity, quenching its fire, and robbing it of its power to cleanse, to heal, to save

all within its sphere. Prayer lifts the soul into a purer region where the dross is consumed. It is the lungs of the spiritual life; there all the gross earthly matter with which the blood of the inner life is laden, gets purged as in a furnace. The vital air of the heavenly region burns the grossness, and sends the blood coursing red and glad through all the channels of the spiritual frame.

The battle cannot be fought without profound depression at seasons. The anguish which wrung from the Saviour the cry, "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,*" every disciple in his measure must taste. Prayer brings Christ into the darkness; it opens the clouds above us, and then pours round the groaning, anguished spirit a flood of glad, inspiring sunlight; the angel to strengthen is never far from the praying soul. There are moments in the battle when heart and flesh fail, when the foes are too many and too strong, when the strain is too intense, and the moan, "*All these things are against me,*" breaks from the overpressed combatant's lips. Prayer brings down the strength of heaven, to reanimate, to restore. Courage, strength, hope, flow into the spirit as it wrestles in supplication. The armour is rebraced, the sword reclasped with a tighter grip, the foot is planted with a sterner

purpose, the helmet is worn with a more gallant gesture, the man goes back to the battle with the strength of Christ in him, and every stroke he delivers carves out his path to victory.

Prayer is the soul's association in the victorious strength, the assured purpose of the Most High. Restrain prayer, you may cast down sword and shield, and roll the helmet with the dust. "*Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return,*" if prayer brings no air of heaven to feed the fires of a Divine life. Be instant in prayer. Pray without ceasing; let your life be a constant dependence upon and communion with the Lord, who lives to fulfil the hope of the universal Creation, and to make His soldiers, who are its head and crown, more than conquerors at last and for ever. And then go forth to battle with the assured step of a victor. "*Greater is He that is with you, than all those that are against you.*" Only believe, and you must beat them down underneath your feet. God will be "*an enemy unto your enemies, an adversary unto your adversaries.*" He will put the fear and the dread of you into the heart of all that opposes your advance, and the progress of His kingdom. Like those warriors of old, as they fought their way into their Canaan, if the life of God be strong

within you, you will strike with unerring certainty and move with irresistible force. Giant hosts and fenced cities will scatter or crumble into dust before you, and, with no stain but that of glorious victory upon you, you shall pass up to the free, noble rest of the promised land.

IX.

THE CONDITIONS OF THE WAR.

“Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?”
—1 Cor. ix. 7.

SOME words on the conditions of the warfare, on God's claim upon the soldier for service, and the soldier's claim upon God for support and strength through all the strain of the battle, and for the prize of victory at last, seem necessary in bringing this brief series of discourses to a close. I have kept steadily in view what appeared to me to be the main purpose of the Apostle, in the stirring words which I have endeavoured to expound. The soldier is to be armed for service against the powers within him and without him, which resist the supremacy of Christ, and mar the peace of man and of the world. Some words on the source of his strength, on the conditions of the conflict, and the assurance of final and glorious victory, may fitly bring our meditations to a conclusion.

Man was not made to be an independent being; his Creator never meant him to be a law,

a God, unto himself. His whole constitution is framed with a view to dependence on one absolute, superior lord. In the old times, the days—as we are fond of calling them—of mediæval darkness and confusion, a lordless man, one who had no lord to whom he belonged, for whom he must fight, and from whom he could claim in return protection and support, was the most wretched of beings. Society, in the close order of the feudal relations, had no room for him, and no work that was honest. The lordless man easily became an outcast and outlaw; buried himself and his misery in a bandit's reckless career of crime, and ultimately in a bandit's grave. Man, having become, as far as his own conscious homage is concerned, lordless, having lost his right by forsaking his allegiance, having through sin no God in the world, has equally no hope. He is just the most wretched outcast in the universe. The man of whom his Lord shall say at last, "Depart from me, I know thee not," turns to face the most awful of all possible dooms.

Man was made to be under a lord; subject to a superior control with an absoluteness and yet, paradox as it may seem, with a freedom of subjection, which has nothing to mate it in the schemes of relation between men and their

masters of which political theorists have dreamed. Men have attempted in all ages, and under all sorts of conditions, to set up this absolute lordship over each other. The effort of masterful minds to impose it on the one hand, and the struggle of the great human herd to resist or to break it on the other, form the most stirring passages in the great drama of history. The Oriental despot in semi-civilized society, and the African chief of a barbarous and brutal tribe, claim and have claimed in all ages, successfully in large measure, to wield this absolute power over their fellow-men. Can anything surpass the sublime arrogance of such a despotism as this: "I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." (Dan. vi. 26, 27.)

Yet there has been one form of despotism known to Christendom which surpasses it both in its claim and its power, and which, as far as we know, has no parallel outside the Christian

pale; the rule of the head of a monastic establishment over those who have voluntarily put, not their acts only, but their thoughts, under his absolute sway. The kind of dominion thus claimed and exercised is avowedly the imitation on earth of the absoluteness of the Divine reign. But even this is but a faint and far-off image of the measure of God's claim on man, and of man's subjection to God, when the man's eye is once opened to "behold the King."

The true root of these ancient despotisms lies deeper, far deeper, than selfish tyranny on the one hand, and slavish indifference or brutality on the other. Man, cut off from his true allegiance by sin, having chosen to be his own master, and falling thereby into relations of dire discord not only with God but with his fellows, discovers in time that he needs a lord to rule and guide him, even in the daily concerns and occupations of life; if all is not to go to wreck, shattered by the storms of passion and self-will. Finding none, he is content to put up with a dull earthly image of a Divine original which has been lost. He puts himself, or suffers himself to fall under man's tyranny, and endures innumerable evils—who shall measure the agony that man has suffered patiently, in all ages under

the iron tyranny of man?—because an instinct of his being which he can neither eradicate nor control, moves him to seek a superior strength and wisdom, under whose shield he may dwell safely; or, at any rate, some image of it, however shadowy—the reality which he is in search of, did he but know it, abiding in the Lord alone.

Men, “drest in a little brief authority,” are able to play the god on earth, and to win for their “fantastic tricks” so largely the admiration and the homage of mankind, because man needs his God and has lost Him; and in his bewildered despair is ready to accept any likely counterfeit, any earthly image of the Divine rule, which is ready to his hand. And so he comes to yield to the “gods many,” and the “lords many” who demand his obedience, the kind of reverent homage which one Lord alone has the right and the power to claim at his hands. The semi-religious reverence with which the Russian peasant regards the Czar, has this at the root of it, and it was paralleled in the old world by the kind of religious homage which a man like Nebuchadnezzar claimed and received from his subjects, as the scene on the plain of Dura records. (Dan. iii.) It is curious that the terminal “tzar,” in the

names of these old Oriental despots, is the root which survives in the modern "Czar."

The bowing down to the fellow-mortal who claims to rule man, no matter by what title, king or priest, dwarfs and degrades him. And it is noted in history, that the tyranny which is most absolute and soul-crushing, is that which, like the Inquisition, makes its claim on man on grounds which touch his spiritual nature, and involve, or profess to involve, the highest and dearest interests of his being, the welfare of his immortal soul. The more, in fact, that man intrudes into the Divine province in his claim to rule over men, the higher in that sense the character and pretensions of his rule, the more withering and torturing does that rule become. It is when he attempts to play the god that man comes nearest to the beast or to the fiend. "Half beast, half fiend," seems to be written legibly on the portrait of Ignatius Loyola; in spite of the splendid power which he manifested in compelling the mind and the will of his followers to work abjectly in submission to his own.

But man is nevertheless made to be ruled absolutely by a king, who claims dominion over his thoughts and passions, as well as over his acts and powers. A king who can brook no

disloyalty, who is jealous if but a thought or an affection strays; who claims the power to dictate man's duty and to appoint man's service; whose word constitutes for him a law absolute as fate; who asserts the right to dispose of His subjects while a nerve thrills with sensation, or a blood-drop throbs with life. He calls them to prisons, to tortures, and to bloody death, when it so seems good to Him, as calmly, as decisively, as to palaces and to thrones; and He recognizes no right in them, even in the very last extremity, either to refuse or to quail. "Submit, obey; I have called thee to it; it is thy warrant, it is enough." "The Holy Ghost witnesseth that in every city bonds and afflictions abide me; but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God." "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." I have heard the command, such an one cries; I obey to the uttermost. Herein alone I realize the true, the glorious liberty of a spirit. A boundless sense of freedom, of power, possesses me; I grow divine. I partake of a nature which makes me

as God, when I bow my will in most utter submission to the King, whose will is that I should be wise, righteous, good, blessed, and glorious as Himself. The servant of Christ is the Lord's freedman; the freeman of the Universe, the freeman of Eternity. We have to consider, in developing the force of the appeal in the text,—

I. The claim which God urges on man to become a soldier in His army.

II. The responsive claim which man may make on God, and which God refuses not to recognize and to meet.

I. The claim which God urges on man for service in the battle-field, with which the language of Scripture is everywhere charged, but which rings out with peculiar clearness in the writings of St. Paul, himself a chief captain in this Divine war.

1. The warfare of God.

There is war in heaven and on earth. "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven." (Rev. xii. 7, 8.) War in heaven! It is, at first sight, a strange, a startling thought. War in the regions

which we dream of as the serene abodes of peace and blessedness; the world where the "*wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest*"? Yes! The Scripture tells us there is war in heaven. All the stormy strife which makes earth's sad history a battle-field, and the cry of the human a battle-cry, is but the image of the grander and sterner conflict which is waging there. The great universe is one vast field of battle. The angels are "the hosts of God;" "the Lord is a man of war;" it was as Captain of the Lord's host that the Son of Man presented Himself of old to our race. It is a universal experience of which we are partakers; it is a universal destiny of which we are the heirs. God does not doom us to a life whose toils and sorrows are all untasted by the purest and the loftiest spirits. We are but a brigade in the grand army, whose hosts are cherubim and seraphim, whose captains are the archangels, whose Chief Captain is the only-begotten Son of God. It may be, nay, it is certain, that we are the pr rrogative band, the band chosen cut and set foremost as those on whose prowess most depends, in the very heart and thick of the war. But the conflict rages all round, above, beneath; the air is filled with the cries of battle, the

shouts of them that conquer, the wail of them that are overcome.

There is nothing in the condition and the constitution of the Universe which has so widely and so deeply impressed humanity in all countries and in all ages, as the signs of struggle and sorrow which everywhere meet us. In the lowest depths of the Creation we see the struggle for life beginning. It prolongs itself through all ages, through all spheres. The final peace is to be the fruit of a glorious and everlasting victory, which has yet to be won. Wise men have noted in all ages that, far as eye can see, far as thought can penetrate, far as imagination can soar, there is stern, dire, deadly war. Men have brooded over the fact with intense, with agonizing perplexity. The last utterance of man's bewildered, tormented heart, as he gazes on the signs of strife and anguish all round, which has reached us, is poured forth in Mr. Stuart Mill's posthumous *Essays on Nature and Religion*, which just now are occupying so much of the attention of the thoughtful, both inside and outside the professedly religious pale.

The fact is everywhere too patent, too glaring, either to be veiled or explained away. A Being who is wise, righteous, good, and benign, whose

heart desires, whose will aims at the essential good of every living thing under the sway of His hand, if we are to believe the testimony of the Scripture that He is Love, has suffered a power in the Universe to rise up and counterwork His benignant designs. There is a power at work in His Creation which is malign and destructive, which hates goodness as intensely as He loves it; which seeks to destroy as eagerly as He seeks to defend it, and to maintain its supremacy in the government of the world. It is a power of such awful range and force that men have believed it to be omnipotent, and have worshipped it as supreme. Others have been driven to formulate the belief that there are two Gods, two Lords of the Creation, the good and the evil power, the spirit of darkness and the spirit of light, struggling together with equal resources, and destined to struggle on; the whole Creation sharing in the agony of the conflict, till the whole system of things, worn out with the strife, shall sink shattered in ruin, and the twilight of the gods and of Nature shall darken into the everlasting night.

The force of evil has seemed to men so resistless and terrible that they have found it impossible to believe that the good God could endure it,

could bear to see His creatures writhe under its yoke, if He had resources at His command which would enable Him to destroy it, and to deliver the Creation from its deadly sway. "One only form of belief in the supernatural—one only theory respecting the origin and government of the universe—stands wholly clear both of intellectual contradiction and of moral obliquity. It is that which, resigning irrevocably the idea of an Omnipotent Creator, regards nature and life, not as the expression throughout of the moral character and purpose of the Deity, but as the product of a struggle between contriving goodness and an intractable material, as was believed by Plato, or a principle of evil, as was the doctrine of the Manicheans."—*Mill's Essays on Religion*, p. 116.

In man, in the animal world, in the inanimate Creation, with its burning deserts, its earthquakes, lava floods, tempests, and typhoons, men have seemed to see these two dread powers carrying on the internecine struggle; and, unenlightened by Revelation, they have thought themselves at once the helpless spectators of the conflict and its prize.

Revelation lifts the veil. Man is right; there is war, deadly war everywhere. Where man has

been wrong is in his estimate of the resources of the glorious King of heaven, the Good One, not only to destroy the prince of darkness, and to deliver the creature from his chain, but to educe from the struggle results which shall justify all the pain and waste of it, to the Universe and to Eternity. The day of the Lord is a long day; too long for man to measure. Within the span of his blinking vision, too weak to look on light, the balance may seem to be swaying, as though equal powers were in conflict. The seers have wider range from higher vantage-ground; they tell us from the height that the victory, the everlasting victory, is with God. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (Dan. vii. 13, 14.) "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put

all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor. xv. 24—28.)

2. Man's nature is the chief theatre, as man himself is the chief soldier of the war.

Fiercely as it rages in the Universe, it rages yet more fiercely within man. Our nature is, so to speak, the chosen battle-ground on which its most momentous interests are to be decided. It is as though he had been created that in him as the arena, and for him as the prize, the battle might be fought out, and the mastery of the good or the evil, God or the devil, settled decisively, and settled for ever. And I believe that this would be a wholly just view of the great purpose of man's creation. Man is so fearfully and wonderfully made, that the tempter may have free access to him as well as God. It had been easy to make him incapable of the struggle and of the misery which it has cost him. Our philosophers are complaining bitterly that

man was not made on this simpler plan from the first. But we are taught that God made man thus in mercy ; knowing that evil would enslave him, and that His victorious grace would redeem him, and establish the supremacy of goodness in the Universe and for eternity.

On man from his first creation, the keenest interest and hope of the contending powers were fixed. Thither came the prince of darkness with his completest armoury of temptation. Thither came the Lord with the most inspiring words of promise and of hope. And he is now doubly qualified to receive the fullest influences of both the spheres. His nature is such as to lay him fully open to the seductions and incitements of the Evil One, on the one hand ; as on the other to the truth, the grace, and the love of God. In a word, he was made to be the field of battle on which contending powers of the Universe should carry on their most tremendous conflict, and where the great controversy which rends Creation should be settled for ever and for ever.

3. But man is not only the chief theatre, he is also the chief combatant in the battle ; and this is the aspect of the matter with which we have most directly and practically to do.

He is both actor and sufferer. That means that

there is in him a double nature, and that his sharpest and sternest struggle is against himself. Man is dual everywhere, through the whole scale of his constitution. Evil has intrenched itself in one part of his nature, and has developed it rapidly in a direction which threatens to bury the whole nature in ruin. But God asserts His rights and maintains His hold, and the struggle between the two is simply unto death. Shall the spirit destroy the flesh—and these terms cover a much wider range than body and soul—or shall the flesh destroy the spirit? is the problem which has to be solved, with keen anguish, in every life. In every life, I say. Soldiers you are, and must be, of God or of the devil. There is no neutral ground on which you can stand indifferent, and calmly survey the war. The most valiant soldiers of God, the most effective champions of evil, which the Universe holds are here in our world. We are bound to believe it, since it was chosen as the theatre of the Incarnation. And every man through his double nature is leagued with the one side or with the other. "Will" he must in every act of his life as a free moral agent; and as he gives his will to God or to the devil, he is fighting with all his force on the one side or on the other, in this awful and, as far as man can see, endless war.

As man fights he suffers; his victories are gained over himself. His baser self, his higher self, as the case may be; but in either case a part of him is beaten, and smarts under the wounds. It is not on one side only, and under one set of conditions, that man becomes a combatant. We talk familiarly of the great battle of the Christian life, as if in that form only we were called to gird on the armour, and to go forth to war. I tell you that there is no escaping it. There are those who will read these words who are fighting harder against God than the best of us are fighting against the devil. Yes, and at infinitely greater cost. And that is the hardest of all battles; the battle against truth, against conscience, against love, against God; the effort not to believe, not to love, not to repent, not to reform, not to be saved; the struggle to stifle all convictions, to crush all emotion that stirs towards heavenly things, to drag down all aspiration, and foul it in the dust.

If you want to discover the men who are fighting hardest and are suffering most terribly, search for those who are doing their very best to make themselves into beasts or fiends. The real agony of the conflict is there. Hard as the battle for God, and for His truth and righteous-

ness may be, the battle against Him is infinitely harder and more costly. To how many of you, who have madly striven to break from Him and to fight down His claims, is the Saviour saying at this moment, Man, man, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Fighting at once against God and against our own best nature, against all that elevates the character, gladdens the spirit, and dignifies the life, is the sternest and saddest of all the conflicts with which man can occupy himself, while the fruit of victory is darkness and the pit.

The great battle of the Universe has thus caught our world into its vortex. Man has become its chief theatre and its chief combatant. Soldier he is, soldier he must be. The one question which is left to him is, Shall the effort, the struggle, be for the devil or for God? Therefore, says the Apostle, in the words which have formed the theme of this little volume, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Eph. vi. 10—17.) Paul sees clearly enough that the energy of each child of our race is being spent lavishly on one side or on the other. To him it is no mystery that the whole Universe is the scene of strenuous conflict. The martial ardour is strong in him; martial images abound in his writings; his words to Timothy—in whom, dear as he was, he saw a certain timidity and softness, which made him tremble for his conduct and renown as a chief leader of the Christian host—have the true martial ring. He reminds him that God is claiming His soldier. He tells him that it is the true self, the true man, the being capable of being made glorious and blessed, whom He seeks to enlist and to arm. He says that the false self, the base self, which the devil has

stirred up to serve him and to own his sway, and which the soldier of the Cross is bound to mortify and to slay, is the bane of man's being, the source of all his weakness, woe, and despair. The Lord claims our service as soldiers against it; the soldiers of God, the fellow-soldiers of Christ. "Mortify," "crucify," "kill," are His commands. Thine eye shall not pity, thine heart shall not spare. "Does thy right eye offend thee," does it own the beck of the devil's hand? "Pluck it out, and cast it from thee." "Does thy right hand offend thee," does it lend itself readily to the devil's uses, does it handle a weapon in the devil's army? "Cut it off, and cast it from thee." "Better to enter into life blind and maimed, than having two eyes and two hands to be cast into hell fire." "Crucify the old man of sin;" "die unto sin," "be dead unto sin." Steel thine heart and nerve thy hand to drive the sword of the Spirit home, and to strike the death-stroke at that nature which has received the Prince of Evil to its throne. No truce is possible, no ruth. "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

(1 Cor. ix. 26, 2.) Having considered thus far the conditions of the great conflict in which we are called to take strenuous part, we shall bring this series of meditations on the whole armour of God to a close by considering the conditions by which God binds Himself to the combatant, to furnish him, to inspire him, and to crown him conqueror, nay, "more than conqueror," at last.

II. The claim which the soldiers of the Cross may make on God; which He refuses not to recognize and to honour, above, yea, exceeding abundantly above, their thought and their hope. He takes on Himself the whole charge of the war.

No true soldier fights for the mere excitement of the conflict, through sheer love of strife and blood. That is the gladiator's not the soldier's passion. It was perhaps the greatest soldier of modern times, who said, "There is only one thing which is worse than a victory—a defeat." War passes out of the brutal into the higher region through the cause, the Captain, the King. The stimulus, the strength, the high enthusiasm which are imparted to, are kindled in, the Christian combatant by his cause, his King, we will now consider as we close—

1. God seeks to inscribe your name in the

muster-roll of His elect—the glorious company, “the general assembly and church of the first-born,” of all countries, of all ages, whose names are written in heaven. All that the Universe holds of wisdom, strength, courage, beauty, goodness, purity, and glory, is found in the ranks of that great army. And there, among them, God would have you stand, full-armed, to share with the host of king-like, God-like spirits, the dangers, the toils, the glories of the field.

Remember that it is no petty, isolated skirmish to which He calls you, and for which He arms you. He charges Himself to find you a post of honour in a great host of noble and worthy comrades; comrades whose fellowship will inspire you with a high exultation, and teach you to glory in your cause, your Captain, your King. This is the first charge which God undertakes—to enlist you; to write your name among the living in Jerusalem; to parade all your noblest and manliest faculties in their fullest form and force; and to send you forth animated by the assurance that you are to fight for a cause which inspires the most intense devotion, and for a King who can kindle the most passionate loyalty and love.

2. God charges Himself with all your furniture

and armament for the war. Alas! for you, if it were otherwise! The inspiration of a great cause is an essential matter; without that there can be no joy in the conflict. But the armament and the training of the soldier are largely important, nay, essential to his success. And God calls you not to the battle without arming and training you. You are "chosen to be" His soldiers; you are fighting against His enemy; you are winning His victory. We have surveyed the armour with which He equips His soldiers. "The armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." It helped a man mightily once in the inward battle; and having won the inward victory, He went forth and overcame the world. "Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If thou be the Son

of God, cast Thyself down : for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee : and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him." (Matt. iv. 1—12.)

The same armour is yours. You have a word of unerring truth to cut the meshes of the devil's nets of sophistry ; and a ready answer to all his suggestions and temptations, stamped with the absolute authority of God. "It is written." I have found the rock, the truth. My soul rests on it. Get thee hence, Satan ; thou hast no part in me. A strong, believing grasp on the realities which are behind the veil ; the vision of things not seen ; the powers of the world to come entering into and possessing the spirit, arming it with

heavenly strength and endurance, and lending to its strokes victorious force—"this is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

3. The Lord is Himself fighting in the front, and is taking on Himself the whole charge of the conduct and issues of the war.

Obliterate the Incarnation from history, and the pessimist philosophers are right. Life is too poor, too sad, to be the ordinance for man of a perfectly wise, good, and almighty God. But the Lord is not one to call you to a conflict whose perils and burdens He Himself refuses to share. What inspiration you can gather from the thought that your field of battle is God's field of battle, in which He is fighting far on in front with your foes, is yours. The Captain who enlists and equips you, leads.

O, Son of Man, thyself hast proved
Our trials and our tears ;
Life's thankless toils and scant repose,
Death's agonies and fears.

"It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Whatever pressure man has to bear, He has borne; the fiercest onsets that man can sustain, He has endured. Nor, having conquered Himself, has He left His comrades to struggle on as they may. He has entered for them into the heavenly places, that with more intense interest and more conquering force He may direct the movements of the army, and sustain every soldier in his hour of need, by the interposition of His almighty hand. The world was a more dread reality to Him than to you, and He came forth into the midst of it, and lived in it alone, that He might bear the chief burden of its overthrow. He "condemned it with an overthrow," before He called you to battle with it. He saw "Lucifer fall from heaven," before He armed you as his antagonist. He overcame the world at the cost of such shame and anguish as were never known till then, and can never be known again, before He left you to be the mark of its fierce assaults. The world shall hate you, He says, shall speak evil of you, shall persecute you; thus the Master suffered, and the "servant is not above his master, nor the disciple above his lord. It is enough for the servant that he be as his master, and the disciple that he be as his lord;" and that means to be conqueror over

world, flesh, and devil ; and to see Satan finally, as He saw him from the first, trampled underneath your feet. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world."

4. He charges Himself with the issue of our conflict ; He assures and prepares the prize of victory.

Though you are fighting against your most deadly enemy and for dear life, He never forgets that Satan was the adversary of God before he was yours ; that he is your enemy because he is God's enemy ; that the battle was the Lord's battle before it was your battle ; and that the victory, though your own escape from deadly, damning peril be the fruit of it, is His victory and Heaven's—the eternal triumph of His grace and of His love. And He charges Himself with the issue. More hangs on it to Him and to the future of His kingdom than finite brain can measure. The fulfilment of the purpose with which He made the worlds ; the justification of that groaning and travail of Creation, which fills the air of heaven with the wail of burdened, sorrowful life, and has in all ages caused the scorners to scoff, and the infidel to blaspheme ;

the vindication of the Incarnation and Passion; the fruit of the Redeemer's tears; the satisfaction of His infinite yearning love; all hang on the issue which His eye foresees, and His hand assures.

Beyond all the strife and anguish through which His eternal purpose unfolds itself, beyond the turbid moaning sea across which we human pilgrims urge our way, He has laid up the issue. He sees; He holds the end in the beginning. No shadow rests on it, no uncertainty troubles it. Life, the life which is love, must conquer in the battle; night must wane, day must rise; moans must be hushed, songs must burst forth; the living Lord must stand at last victorious amid the splendours and the trophies of the new Creation, while around, above, musical as the voice of many waters, terrible as the voice of many thunders, the pæan floats, "The kingdoms of this world, the kingdoms of all worlds, are become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. Hallelujah! hallelujah! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

And He charges Himself, too, with the soldier's recompense; He has laid up for His victors an immortal crown. From the first He instructs you that it is His warfare that you are waging;

that you have the right to claim His help and sympathy, the right to look to the might of His arm for victory. It were weary work if we were a scattered band; each one fighting in his own strength and for his own hand. The thought is full of a bright inspiration, that we are Christ's soldiers, in the "grand army" of the Universe, and that the great high throne must be shattered, and all the fruit of Gethsemane and Calvary must be trampled in the dust, before the Captain can suffer the crown of victory to be wrested from our brows. "He that overcometh shall sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am seated with my Father on His throne."

"Our Captain leads us on,
He beckons from the skies;
He reaches forth a starry crown,
He bids us take the prize,

Be faithful unto death,
Partake my victory,
And thou shalt wear a glorious wreath,
And thou shalt reign with me,"

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold upon eternal life." "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry,"

thou steward and minister of the manifold grace of God; and then, when the battle is fought out, and the weary, fainting soldier feels that the sword and shield, which he has borne so bravely, are slipping from his stiffening hand, his dying lips shall breathe out a triumphant strain which shall ring forth, trumpet-like, an inspiring battle-cry to all who are still struggling and suffering in the field: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love His appearing."

THE END.



